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In the Sixties

SARAH B. RICKER



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IN THE SIXTIES

BY
SARAH B. RICKER

THE
Abbey Press

PUBLISHERS

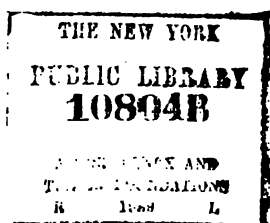
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FIFTH AVENUE

NEW YORK

London

Montreal



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FOREWORD.

THE colonial days of our sires have been given to us in book and story, and of their everyday life have we heard in wildest romance; while the tale of the pioneer, who first invaded our primeval forests, has been handed down in all its weird adventure and heroism.

Wealth has been represented in its glittering array; poverty in its ragged attire, even the slums of our great cities have been pictured to us in truth and fable; but the former operative of our New England mills, and the usages of those early days, have been largely lost to the public, and suffered to remain enveloped in the shadows of the past. In the earlier days of our history, the sites of our extensive cities were but sparsely settled towns, peopled by a farming community, who gained from the grudging soil a subsistence, but found few dollars for the less positive wants of a numerous family. Then, as a day star to woman, came the cotton mill, and gave to her fettered ambition the first chance to show the world her latent power for good. To the grasping of this first opportunity may we not trace (in part), the individuality and self-supporting independence which characterizes the woman and girl of to-day. With Yankee energy these mills were pushed forward, till in the sixties, they were to be found on many of our rivers and streams.

In sending forth a work touching the gone-by period, we are not thoughtless of the many discouragements to be met, writers of name and experience, and books whose number is legion. The

whispered voice of approval may be silenced by the seething words of criticism and censure, and its future, at best, be uncertain as the frail bark on the wind-swept wave.

The incidents here recorded may not be in accord with present happenings, yet a few may look back, and forgetting the intervening decades, live for a brief moment in the realities of earlier days.

But the sixties were long, long ago, and we are living, not only in a time when the locomotive supplants the mule express, but in a new century, and in those changed conditions which time invariably brings around.

In the sixties, when war swept our broad domain, and blood was written on every doorpost, the occurrences here recorded were collected, varying but little from transpiring events in real life. Founded on facts, with no character overdrawn, it has been kept as a memorial of the past, until later circumstances have called it from its hiding, and we send it forth, hoping the adventurous tale may not be wholly ignored, but accepted as a true reminiscence and souvenir of the sixties.

IN THE SIXTIES.

CHAPTER I.

*Oh, did we but see, how in smallest things
Are beginnings of that which is great,
Life's soil would be watered by countless springs,
That now 'neath the surface wait,
We should feel when earthward kindly sent,
For heroes and heroines all were meant.*

—CHARLOTTE YONGE.

IN a country town near the interior of rockbound Maine, stood a small brown house, that in its more youthful days would have impressed the passing traveller with only a small idea of comfort and plenty; and now that it had braved the storms and winds of many seasons, its blackened and mossy surface spoke but too plainly of indigence within; yet nothing portrayed an idle shiftlessness, which is often plainly pictured on old and timeworn habitations. The small lawn in front, though limited in extent, was kept free from rubbish, and the grass still remained fresh and green, while the few flowers and climbing vines on each side of the low door, seemed inviting the soft rays of the western sun to hide 'mid the fluttering branches, and help relieve the lone house of its desolate look.

1861

It was here that a young girl, with flashing eyes and golden ringlets, skipped lightly up a well-kept path, and with a face radiant with excitement and hope, entered a small room where an older sister sat, a trifle pale from slight indisposition, exclaiming as she circled her small arms around her neck:

"All right, Annie, or are you as Mrs. North says of her hired girl, awful sick if there is anything to do?"

"I do not often resort to subterfuge," replied the sister, "but what is there to be done?"

"You know we are preparing for school examination. Rev. Mr. Merten and Dr. Meags have visited our room this afternoon; am sorry you were not there, you always plan a headache the wrong day."

"Can't you repeat what interests you so much?"

"Not to sound as it did there. You know Mr. Merten is different from any other man. He talked to the boys in his own way, told them they might be great and good; that the door to advancement was never closed to the American boy, who, by application can develop latent energies, and, step by step rise higher and higher, till like a Cromwell, he can control armies, or follow the steps of a Milton, whose works have come down the centuries with unabated lustre; or yet nearer home, a Webster, the greatest of American orators, who for a quarter of a century swayed our legislative halls by his sublime eloquence. They could be all this—and like them,

"Leave behind footprints on the sands of time."

Finally, holding up a golden medal, he told them it would be awarded for the best declamation."

"What did he say to the girls?" asked Miss Annie, the curl of her pouting lip becoming more positive.

"Not much—only there is to be a prize essay which is to draw a book from the parson's library."

"'Baxter's Catholic Theology,' 'Jonathan Edwards' Sermons,'"



replied Annie, "or some other metaphysical work, which one would be expected to read, and give a bow of assent at various points, not knowing whether the affirmative nod was in the right place or the wrong."

"Not of that class at all. But why speak so sarcastically of those books? I supposed they were standard works and very good."

"So they were, in their day and generation. But the world moves, a fact Mr. Merten has forgotten, and he still clings to those old dogmas as the keystone of his religious structure."

"No matter about Mr. Merten. Ministers are only men, who think and speak as men, inheriting all the fallibilities of our race. The book, instead of a prosy centenarian, is a volume from the pen of Thomas Dick, whose every word you cherish as grand and inspiring. Now look better natured, I am sure you can get it."

"Prizes are not often secured without effort."

"No great effort will be required to compete with Bell Meags and Mollie Farrar, the only two yet entered."

"Perhaps not. But what shall we write about? Delve to the centre and ladle up some of the molten fluid of this old earth for a subject, or shall we soar above and tell of big Mercury, its nearness to the sun, its dazzling brightness, its swiftness of motion! the bright-eyed Venus, goddess of love, you know. Saturn, with its magnificent ring, encircling it with perpetual light, or Jupiter, with its moons and belts, whirling around at the rate of 26,255 miles an hour; and—and—as that is about all I know, I should stop and listen for the deafening applause, even encore of a delighted audience, which shall fall on my listening ear, sweet as the first spring songs of the redbreast."

"Oh, Annie, why try to be sarcastic or funny, when you don't know how, and never did. Just take something you understand, some moral subject, some question of the day—do your best, and my word for it, you will take the cake."

"Thank you, little sister, but my better judgment tells me it would be wiser for me to stay at home and play jackstraws, than attempt to air my literary talents before the tribunal of judges you have mentioned. Besides, there are real objections to entering a contest conducted with so much partiality. The boys are cited to men who have risen to fame and eminence and told by effort they may be equally successful, and a golden medal held up as an incitement to exertion, while for the best written page the girls are offered a book. I hope it will be new—not half-worn by frequent reading."

"There again, you always have such strange whims. Not another girl in school would question motives, or trace and calculate the bearings of any particular class of words."

Annie and Nina Wilmot were, as we have said, of New England birth, as yet knowing little of the outside world beyond the small village where they had lived with their parents, guarded ever by the jealous eye of love. They were accustomed to all the inconveniences of poverty, the prosperity of early life having been obscured by later privations and want. From the parents the elder child inherited both pride and will, but she loved with fond idolatry her beautiful sister, and seldom turned a deaf ear to her gentle, persuasive voice.

"Yes, Nina," she said after a short pause, "I will write an essay with no thought of winning a branch of the Idumæan palm, nor even a crown of laurel, as the victor's prize, but just to please you."

"Oh, thank you," and kissing her sister, Nina glided from the room, leaving Annie to select her subject and commence the promised essay. It was soon finished, studied and corrected with critical care.

The day came at last and with it the closing scenes, the exercises of speaking and reading of original essays. Annie Wilmot was one of the first to stand before a gazing, listening throng of villagers. A slight trembling of the voice marked the first

words, then, forgetful of prejudice and partiality, she thought only of the words she uttered, while confidence and a modest assurance of success gave to her essay the most pleasing effect. As she finished reading, her clear, bright eye was raised, and she listened to a faint murmur of applause that came from the lips of her wondering neighbors. They had known the child from her cradle, and judged her abilities from the advantages of a common school—all she had ever attended—not even a term at the academy in their pretentious little village. It seemed a miracle to their honest hearts that a girl who knew so little of the world dare undertake a public reading, and yet more astonishing, its probable result. Other essays were read, and the exercises of the hour assumed an unexpected importance. Parents, as well as pupils, looked anxiously to the small volume as it was passed slowly for the award. Mr. Merten, as chairman of the committee, was first to speak.

Looking gravely over his audience of listening neighbors, he turned to the boys, and seemed to address them separately, as he told them of the responsibilities of their coming years; of the possibilities of those who would, by earnest effort, fit themselves to grasp opportunities which are often developed in an unthought of time and way.

"Our attention," he went on, "has been especially called to the last exercise, a prize having been offered the girls for the best original essay.

"Your committee feel bound by circumstances to give this book to Miss Annie Wilmot. Were it not for slight inaccuracies another might take the prize now given to Miss Wilmot. Others are deserving great credit, but only one can have the book. In manner Miss Wilmot was simple and unaffected, her enunciation clear and distinct, her theme inspiring, her style smooth and elegant, displaying originality of thought and perfect mastery of her ground. We are glad," he added, turning towards Annie's father, "that one of our less fortunate citizens has a daughter

of so much promise. May this be only the beginning of the end, the first of many coming honors."

For a moment the hot blood rushed to the cheek of Annie Wilmot. If the prize was justly her due, why should it be given grudgingly, and again, how did Mr. Merten, the priest of the Meek and Lowly, *dare* to darken forever that one bright spot in her weary life by any humiliating reminiscence touching her father.

"I hate him!" and the thought trembled on her lips, as loud whispers near her called her attention.

Annie soon recognized the voice as that of Betsy Meags, the doctor's maiden sister, and sat with bated breath as she went on:

"Unfortunate citizen indeed! Strange our minister is so delicate about putting the right word in the right place; then, instead of 'unfortunate citizen' it would be drunken profligate, as everybody knows. I knew Harry Wilmot when he was casting his net for a wife. I wasn't a professor then and didn't hardly believe in spirits coming back, but I thought then, and I think now, that some good angel left the bright, heavenly home for a time and whispered *no!* in both my ears so I might see my way clear to refuse young Wilmot. Every one thought me foolish; even my brother, the doctor, looked on it as the mistake of my life. But in the light of following events we all felt constrained to 'praise God from whom all blessings flow.'"

"A love affair between you and Harry Wilmot. I never heard of it before," remarked an elderly woman who was seated near Miss Meags.

"Oh, well, we kept it quiet. You know a refined and sensitive lady will not compromise her dignity by any reference to heart conquests."

"Was there a real proposal?"

"Just the same. He had taken all the preliminary steps; but found he was approaching an iceberg, and when he saw a neg-

ative flashing from both my eyes he drew back to his proper place, just as a turtle slinks into his shell."

"Very strange that only you should discover so many faults in the then handsome and generous Harry Wilmot."

"You know, Mrs. Winslow, I was born with a veil over my face and such are always given what is termed second sight. I well knew beauty would be a crooked stick to lean on. You see I understand human nature and can read character like an open book."

The young girl heard no more, but silently turned from the scene, feeling she had received a lifelong insult.

"Annie has got the prize," exclaimed Nina Wilmot, as she entered the presence of her mother a step in advance of her sister. "I knew she would."

A smile of love and pride lit the face of Mrs. Wilmot, but the impenetrable calm came again as Annie stood before her, flushed and excited.

"Prize indeed," she said as one little, nervous hand threw the book pettishly towards the table, "but I wish it had been burned before I had heard of it."

"No, no, Annie!" and the cold fingers of the child touched the burning cheek of her sister. "I know Mr. Merten did not talk quite right, but he did not think. Mother says great minds always fail in small things."

"As if Mr. Merten was a second Shakespeare, living a hundred years before his time instead of a medieval old foggy—without a single advanced thought. He has been here the last dozen years and from the first has manifested a distinction quite unworthy his profession, and to-day he has drawn the line so plainly there could be no mistake. To me the words of such a teacher must come as water spilled on the sand. All that is uplifting, hopeful and good I will accept and cherish, but powers and principalities can never bend my knee before the golden shrine of mammon. Nor will I ever congratulate the stupid boy whose

father's money shall secure to him a position of ease and reward for services he has never rendered."

Here the girls were interrupted by the coming of the father.

Mrs. Wilmot's trembling hand put the offending book in her own small desk, and on its cover dropped a bitter tear as she murmured, "Why this new trial to my child—why—why?"

CHAPTER II.

*Mourn not for the child from thy tenderness riven,
Ere stains on its purity fell;
To thy questioning heart, lo! an answer is given,
Is it well with the child? It is well.*

—WILLIS.

A FEW months had passed, and the heart-burnings caused by the unpleasant scenes of the examination were suffered to smoulder in silence, for darker events drew near the home of the Wil-mots, and in their gathering shadow life's lesser shadows seemed but light afflictions. "Winds that a moment bent its flowers." The pet Nina had gathered her youthful robes about her and by the 'dark river' peacefully awaited the rest of the pure in heart. Gently, and with tireless care, hoping against hope, Annie watched the drooping flower till its leaves had withered and she knew the spirit's germ had been carried upward, to spring afresh by the river of life and mature in radiant beauty in the sunshine of eternal day. The mother's long kept wedding gown of white was by Annie's own hand fashioned into a burial robe for her idolized Nina, and in her plain coffin every fold arranged by her trembling fingers; while on the silent breast nestled the last white rose of summer. "Only white," she murmured, "emblem of purity, joy and life." Then her gentle head, as if she slept, was pil-lowed in its own soft ringlets of golden light.

A few neighbors had assembled to listen to the prayer of Mr.

Merten. The schoolmates of the young girl were there to see her for the last time, then take with them to their homes memories of her sweet, unselfish life. George Sherman and Fred Allen, boys growing rapidly to manhood, stood apart from the small company, the one with manifest indifference, while the other looked pityingly on the sorrows of the afflicted family, to whom earth and sky had been draped in darkness by the angel of Death.

With measured tread the coffined child was carried from the room, but the sister's eye was dim, and half insensible to her surroundings, realized less acutely the pain of seeing her cherished one carried out from the home where she had been the charm to fascinate the sunshine, to expel sadness and anxiety.

"Stay," said George Sherman, as with a look of disgust he placed a detaining hand on the arm of Fred Allen, who had turned towards the stricken girl. "Stay—anything but sentiment and display at a pauper's funeral. Let us be off."

"Shame on you, George!" and with a quick, contemptuous move he released his arm and hastened to the side of Annie, who had unfortunately heard the stinging words of young Sherman.

"Shall I assist you?" asked Fred, as the dark, tearful eyes were raised to his face.

"No! Fred, no! You are kind, and I shall always remember you—always. But I am better now. I can walk without help. If I could forget! If I could die! I cannot fight life's battle. I shrink at its first sound."

With Sherman's words ringing painfully in her ears, rousing to new strength as the first crushing thought passed away, Annie joined with firmer step the few friends who followed little Nina to her churchyard rest. There, in the shadow of a spreading tree, 'mid whose branches the summer sun would love to linger, they laid her down to sleep, while the notes of a single bird, hidden among the half sere leaves, floated like heavenly music on the mellow air. No cloud darkened the beauty of an autumnal sky,

and late wild flowers blooming around the quiet spot and mingling their fragrance with the voice of heaven's own songster, rose as holy incense, pure and acceptable to Him who had seen

*"A smile too bright,
A heart too innocent,
Too tender and warm for this world of ice
And called it away to Paradise."*

Short had been the mission of that young life, yet who should dare say it had been in vain?

Quite unattended the family returned to their desolate home, now shrouded in a gloom impenetrable, to be lighted only by the finger of time and the hope of a blessed immortality.

To the father the very air was stifling and he went forth in the semi-darkness, hoping the cool breeze of evening might fan his brow and stay the throbbing of his bleeding heart.

Edward Wilmot was the youngest of the family—"the lily of the line"—a frail boy of twelve years. To him Death was an enigma and the thought that his beautiful sister had fallen by the dreadful Reaper was insufferable, and to his young mind the reality was fast becoming an overpowering force.

"Mamma," he said, as he saw her quietly seated by herself, "what is Death? I do not know, I cannot understand."

"Perhaps I shall fail to explain so you will comprehend it any better. There is a great mystery connected with the beginning and the end of life. When this 'harp of a thousand strings' ceases to vibrate, when the heart no longer beats and all thought and consciousness shall be veiled in oblivion, the spirit leaves the body and we call it Death."

"The spirit leaves the body. But what is the spirit?"

"Again, my son, you have asked a question which has been carefully studied by wiser heads than yours, yet failed to comprehend it in its fullness. It is not tangible, not material, but that

principle which thinks, loves, hopes—'tis the soul—the breath of the Invisible, a part of Infinity.”

“Does the spirit ever die?”

“Can the great I Am, filling all immensity, and sitting on the circle of the heavens, die? No, my child. Spirit lives on and on. It is immortal, it cannot perish.”

This talk of the occult and unknown might have lasted indefinitely had it not been terminated by the unexpected coming of a stranger—and yet not a stranger.

Mrs. Wilmot rose to receive her unceremonious guest, while Annie, recognizing the tall, bony figure of the elder Sherman, or, as he was more frequently called, “Old Bill,” did not move from the low stool on which she was sitting. After a glance round the room Mr. Sherman was first to speak.

“Was going along and thought I'd call. Hain't seen ye fer quite a spell, and ye know when folks get kinder along and grey like they like to talk over old times. If some of us make mistakes, that's not here nor there; no use in being sorry arterwards. It's like locking the stable arter the hoss is stole.”

To Mrs. Wilmot these words were but the beginning of the end. Full well did she know that some sinister motive had drawn him to their humble dwelling on that sad night, when she was so entirely unprepared to cope with her bitter foe.

A moment's silence. Would he speak again, or had this hard man repented the harsh words that must open afresh the wounds of her bleeding heart?

She had not long to doubt, ere William Sherman, in a voice pitched on a higher key, went on:

“Many changes since we's boys, and I've been thinking gals should be terrible careful how they jump at these 'ere Lord Gulls, with empty pockets and mebbly a little book larning, which they think will do the clean thing fer um, and it duz if they like a shaky crib and little fodder.”

And again his eye went wandering round the bare room and

rested with demoniac pleasure on the pale face of Mrs. Wilmot.

In the bosom of that quiet woman, chastened by many sorrows, there was a struggle, like the mad waves of old ocean dashing against the rock, ere she could meet the exultant gaze of that strange, unfeeling man. But the victory was gained, and when she spoke her voice was low and quiet as in the summer days of her girlhood. Even William Sherman felt the spell of its sweetness as she gently replied to his tirade of words.

"Although your visit was not expected, I know its import and the design of words which you have chosen, knowing as a two-edged sword they must pierce me through and through in this, the hour of our sore affliction. But they have not driven me from my fortress, from the Rock that is higher than I, my sure defense when deep waters would engulf me. Mr. Sherman, you do not know me, and will not understand when I tell you, if I could go back and choose again I would take the same path in which I have walked these many years, and in which I have found not only trial but much of real happiness."

"Well, thar," replied the incredulous Sherman, "if it don't beat all nater how consated and willful some folks is. Jest so when you was a gal. But what I was going to say: I had a little arrent here to-night. I should have waited and not come so soon arter the funeral, but have got to go away to-morrow, and shouldn't have time. I may as well tell you that neighbors get tired of helping folks that don't help themselves. Here's Annie, old enough and big enough to airn her vittles, and that's all sich gals ever do, 'cause they eat amazingly. Mebby we can help you out and give you a lift just now by taking her to our house to help do the chores—wash dishes and fix the taters, and the old woman will larn her sunthing 'bout work. It may sp'ile her nice hands, but lots better than the poorhouse. What do you say?"

The restraining look of Mrs. Wilmot was lost on the now thoroughly aroused daughter, who rose from her seat and stood face

to face with the man whom she had always disliked, though why she could hardly tell. With a voice low and tremulous with emotion she said:

"I say I shall never be your slave; that circumstances shall never bring me within your reach. That poverty is my heritage I do not deny, but none not possessed of the lowest and most detestable spirit would seek to drag still lower those battling with every energy against the misfortunes of life, and, sadder yet, weighed down by the terrible hand of Death. A girl of no account. But know that mine is an individuality *you* can never control. Think you I will let the possibilities of my young life be ground 'neath the iron heel of your oppression? Never!"

As Annie stopped from sheer exhaustion, her auditor found the chance to say:

"Sassy jade—your marm's own gal. Guess you'll find 'beggars can't be choosers.'"

"And you will find your wicked devices foiled. Though disappointment and many disasters overtake me, know you I will rise from the ashes prouder and stronger than ever before. Tell me of the poorhouse. There I will never go—never! Better let your voice be hushed in the fathomless depths of the darkest cave than dare say the word again to me or mine."

One step forward and a slight tap of the little foot hurried the intruder from the presence of those he had sought to humiliate.

From a window Annie saw the angry man turn with clinched fist towards the door he had just left, as if invoking all the angels from the council chamber of pandemonium. A sudden turn, a step on a rolling stone, and William Sherman was taking his evening bath in a pool of muddy water by the roadside, while his own astonished canine came yelping to the rescue of his master and with tooth and nail tugged at the back of his half-worn pants till kicks and blows sent him to the covert of a nearby wood.

Almost a smile lit the sad eyes of the child till she saw the pale and tear-stained face of her mother. Then she knew, with

all the rapidity of thought, that she had wounded and surprised a trusting nature and added a new anxiety to a heart already overburdened. Hastening to her side she clasped her in her arms and sobbed:

"Oh, mother, I could not help it, I could not help it."

"I fear you did not try. I have been young, and with a temperament not unlike your own, was not long in finding the pitfall to which hasty and angry words were sure to lead; forgetting that one who can control an impulsive and passionate nature is greater than the one who conquers a city. One may have courage and decision to meet all emergencies and yet preserve a ladylike dignity that cannot stoop to harsh and bitter words."

That the girl was truly sorry for the wound she had inflicted on her dearest friend there was no doubt. That she was penitent was quite another question. Lifting her head—the fount of her tears quite dry—she asked:

"What would be the gentle smile or the sweetest expression that ever danced in the eyes of a beautiful girl, or yet her words soft and musical as the notes of the eolian harp, what, I ask, would be their effect on a nature like William Sherman's?"

"But, darling, let me ask, what would the cyclone do?"

"Oh, that is supposed to clear its own path and challenge whatever comes within the sweep of its broad wings. But, mother, dear, what did he mean? Much that you seemed to understand was a mystery to me. The poorhouse and pauper story I know—and supposed it was only broad acres that had divided us—but now I know that I see through a glass darkly. I would no longer live in conjecture, but know it, whatever it may be."

"You have had excitement enough for one day."

"Dearest mother, tell me all to-night."

"Have you forgotten that self-control and patience is often the key to success?"

"Patience," replied Annie, "with these phantoms around me. From the commencement of our trouble with the Shermans it

has probably been told around every hearthstone in town and I think it strange some gossip had not whispered it to me. But sooner or later it must come and perhaps in the most disagreeable way. Shall it be you that will tell me, or shall the story be left to other and perhaps less truthful lips?"

Waves that a moment before had surged so wildly in the bosom of Mrs. Wilmot, listened to the still, small voice, and the eye that answered the questioning gaze of Annie had regained all its accustomed tranquillity.

"A mother," she replied, "would not withhold aught that would increase the happiness of her child. I may have thought you too much a child, but I knew this hour would come, that ere long you would feel the rough winds, and I must stand powerless to help. It was not well that your young life should be burdened with anxieties, and the severe and harder duties, but you have seen enough to know yours is not a downy pillow. You have many lessons to learn. But I am proud to feel you will not sit down in weak inefficiency and in useless lamentations over what you do not like. Effort may control circumstances and in time overcome what at first seemed insurmountable obstacles. I have not often spoke of the past, nor have I allowed myself to think, lest its incidents should magnify by too much reflection, and the sweet scenes of my early life become obscured by the dark cloud that spread its drooping wings till the light of hope was nearly extinct in the darkness of perpetual night."

CHAPTER III.

*Could'st thou boast, oh child of weakness,
O'er the sons of wrong and strife,
Were the strong temptations planted
In thy path of life?*

—WHITTIER.

AFTER a short silence, in which Mrs. Wilmot seemed collecting strength for an unpleasant duty, she turned to Annie and said:

"From your earliest childhood you must have been aware of coldness between the Shermans and ourselves; and why, before to-night, you have not asked the cause of this manifest estrangement has long been a wonder. We would not burden our young children with the hard things of life, which must come, as the morn goes steadily on to the heated noon, but let the past rest in blissful ignorance while it can; that from the meridian they may look backward to one bright and sunny spot—a happy childhood. It may be I have too long hidden a painful subject, but my aversion shall no longer be an excuse for silence. You have asked to know. Sit down and I will tell you all.

"First, let us go back to scenes in the dear old home—scenes I cannot remember, when, a helpless child, I was placed in my father's arms, my mother dying as the new pledge was intrusted to his care. From that hour I was the object of his peculiar love, who petted with unwise indulgence every whim of my capricious nature.

"At seventeen I was engaged to Harry Wilmot, my father objecting to my marriage till three more years should add their experience to the past, and even longer, if a good home and promise of plenty were not offered to the child of his love. With a father's care he thought to hedge me around with happiness, so closely woven and tangled that trouble could not creep through and follow in the wake of our marriage vows. Dear old man, he passed to his eternal home without awakening from his pleasant dream. I never loved the crowded mart, the thronged streets and tainted air of large towns and cities. I had lived away from their noise and din and my earliest remembered pleasures were found in the shade of the greenwood, by the brook and gathering flowers from nature's own garden to adorn our little parlor and be scattered at random through the house.

"My preference for rural life met with no opposition from my affianced husband, and it was decided that he should accept the first favorable offer and change his residence from a counting-house in Bradford to some country location, where his home should hide in the thick foliage of the maple, or be protected from the scorching heat by some giant oak, bravely defying the keenest blast.

"As a kind of preliminary lesson, at my own request, I was installed housekeeper in my father's home, while William Sherman, then a young man, was employed as farm-hand to look after the outdoor work. He was faithful in the performance of his allotted duties, but his face was hard and selfish and his manner repulsive, as you have seen to-night. I had never liked him and soon learned to dread his coming. My eyes fell before his gaze, and with an instinctive shrinking, or, I might say, hate, I hid in the quiet of my own room before he came to the house at dark, or after finishing work for the day. My engagement was not a secret, but I did not rely on it as any shield against disagreeable advances that might be gaining strength in the breast of William Sherman. Such selfish natures have no appreciation of truth

and honor; no respect for the sacredness of plighted love. As I have said, I carefully shunned him, while he as carefully watched for the convenient season. It came at last, as all disagreeable things will come sooner or later. It was a summer afternoon and I sat alone in our little parlor, dozily dreaming in the soft light which came through the curtained window. The very breath of heaven was hushed and listening as young Sherman walked into the room, and in a coarse way expressed a passion of which I knew him to be incapable. I respect the love of an honest heart, however broken the language by which it is conveyed. But I had not been listening to an honest man, and every circumstance forbade the exercise of charitable feelings. I grew angry, and an unqualified negative waited impatiently for utterance. Still he kept me silent by his many words, till he had told—not only the story of his love—but of his worldly goods, placing the latter in the foreground, as the incontrovertible argument. ‘The old man,’ he said, referring to his father, ‘was well off, having several thousands of ready money besides a good farm. This property would fall to him and an only brother.’

“‘You have a sister,’ I suggested, wondering if the most amiable member of the family was, at the day of reckoning, to be cast forth as a stranger and alien.

“‘Oh, sartin,’ was his coarse reply, ‘but Nance, you know, is only a gal; she can’t expect to share jest the same as us boys in the home property. She’ll hav’ to stay where she is a spell, ’cause the old folks can’t do without her, but bimeby, if she’s perticular about a home of her own, she must hunt up a feller and git married, for nobody will want her hanging round them when the old folks are both dead.’

“‘You will pay her for her work and care of your parents, or has your father made some provision for her future?’

“‘She gets her pay as she goes along. Her vittles and clothes is more’n she ’arns, but I suppose she’ll have to have a trifle, not

a big pile, though. The will's all right on that p'int. You see the old covey is rising of seventy and according to nater can't stand it much longer. Ha, ha, won't that Harry Wilmot be in the shade then? fur money's what makes the mare go, arter all.'

"The rude man drew nearer and rested his sunburned hand on my shoulder. I shrank as from the touch of a viper.

"'Dare you,' I asked indignantly, 'think I will tolerate your presence or listen to your sayings? Ignorant wretch, the very demon of avarice, rejoicing at the prospect of a parent's death and scheming the robbery of an only sister.'

"'Better think a little, young lady, before you say much more,' he replied. 'You're nothing but an upstart gal, and 'tain't likely you'll ever have another such a chance to drive your geese to market. Jest you marry who you are a mind to, but you'll be sorry for your sarse and this whole affair, some time.'

"'Go!' I said, pointing towards the door. 'Leave me or my father shall be informed of the particulars of this interview.'

"I was very angry, and my words drove William Sherman from my door a lifelong enemy.

"Other months flew quickly by and the three years of my engagement were nearly ended when the York, now the Sherman home, was for sale. With my father's assistance it was secured for my future home. The buildings were repaired, so far as needed, the rooms newly furnished and at last only a single sun separated me from the blessed name of wife. That, Annie, was perhaps the happiest day of my life. My past had been strewn with flowers, and very few sad memories came back to mar the present, while no dark phantom of the future cast its brooding shadows around my way. We were married, and swiftly passed the first year of happy life. Then my dear father was called to the reward of his many virtues. My only brother, after settling the estate, departed on a tour to Europe, from which he never returned. Other and repeated afflictions left me nearly alone with only my husband to love and trust. It was then that William

Sherman entered our home, and with words slightly conciliatory asked that existing difficulties and all fancied wrongs might be forgotten and our long-cherished feud be pleasantly adjusted.

"I only wished to rid myself of his hated presence and I allowed him to depart without telling him how thin and transparent the veil with which he sought to blind, that I understood his insincerity and falsehood. After our one stormy interview I had seen him but seldom and rebelled against every renewal of the acquaintance. He had married a quiet girl, noted more for her yielding, peaceful way than for resolution and self-respect, traits so important to cope successfully with the oppressive and conceited nature of William Sherman.

"The months of another year glided away, and you came to my arms, a new object to love, a welcome jewel in my crown. You were six months old before the first breath of suspicion darkened my life. At first 'twas but a fleeting shadow of something—I knew not what.

"It was a bright, clear day, yet I was sad and restless. The spectre grew in magnitude as I vainly listened for footsteps that should have broken the weary stillness long before. Had I been heedless, blindly stupid? Where had my husband been days, yes, months in the past? I dared not answer my own question. My woman's instinct was now thoroughly aroused. With no object—yet unable to think quietly,—I passed from room to room, till I stopped before a window overlooking our beautiful grove of maples. I was surprised to see under the tallest and yet remaining tree two men whom I was obliged to recognize as my husband and William Sherman. They were gambling, while near them in the bright, clear sunlight stood the gambler's cup of ruin and death. This was the first fiery ordeal, and all my stoic pride and will, kept in the background, as I sank to the floor, dazed and wretched. Happily the dawn of this awful revelation found me alone. No curious eye was near to wonder and inquire.


"From that time I need not tell you of our downward course,

for who does not know the retrograde path of him who lingers long at the wine! Who is not familiar with the miseries of his wife and little ones, as his honor, home and bread are indiscriminately bartered at the bacchanalian feast?

"With William Sherman for a pilot, one could not linger long on the way to ruin. In an incredibly short time he had placed his rough hand on all our possessions, and we were bidden to leave our pleasant home for a shelter under some other roof. Even then, when the most formidable array of obstacles was on every side, I was not in despair. Above them all my trust and hope looked for the opening of the dark clouds which were hiding the clear, blue sky beyond.

"The writings which had given to Mr. Sherman a legal claim to our homestead were considered imperfect without my signature, which I purposely withheld. The new proprietor finding other means had failed, came in person to present his papers and urge his claims. Finding me stubborn and inflexible, he became very angry, exhausting his entire vocabulary in useless threats. To me it was rather pleasant than otherwise, to know that one wish of that bad, oppressive man could be thwarted by my refusal. My words were positive, my manner defiant, and he left me with perfect knowledge that I would never lend my name to render unencumbered the claim to his new possessions.

"We had not lived a long time in this shattery old house when I was startled by voices and the tramp of feet at an unusually early hour, for I had been accustomed to sitting alone till very late—midnight and even later hours had sometimes found me an anxious watcher. It was scarcely dark when our rickety door creaked on its rusty hinges, and strong men brought to me my bleeding and insensible husband. Half intoxicated, he had mounted a young and spirited horse. All unused to the bridle the animal reared and plunged till his rider was thrown, getting a frightful cut on the head and a severe internal injury from



which he was supposed to be dying. Till that sad moment I never knew how well I loved my husband, how inseparably my own existence was linked with his. Mr. Allen, to whom we are indebted for so many favors, assisted in taking the injured man to his home, then, after speaking a few hopeful words, went to obtain medical aid, accompanied by my little ones, who were to be cared for at his own home. Other neighbors came and went in the performance of different services, made necessary by the accident. By this means it happened that I was ere long left alone with my poor husband and Mr. Sherman. He had come with the others, not an idle spectator, not as a friend, but to see the consummation of his own handiwork. He thought that Harry was dying, and came to witness the first frenzied grief of my widowed heart. Then might be his golden moment. Paralyzed by the suddenness of the blow my right hand might forget its cunning and become the pliant tool of his will. I saw the evil in his sinister look, and when he drew from his pocket and unfolded a soiled sheet I understood his errand. My heart grew faint and every power of endurance seemed to fail. But when we are thrown entirely on our own resources, knowing that no arm can reach us, we usually rise equal to the occasion. With a stifled groan I turned from the author of all my misery, and, bending low over the couch, tried to catch, if possible some signs of returning consciousness.

“‘It may be,’ he said, without leaving the table by which he was standing, ‘you wa’n’t kalkerlating to see me to-night, and it don’t seem jest the thing, but I started to come afore I knew your husbun’ was killed, so I kept on. But I won’t trouble you but a minit. You know you didn’t sign that ’ere deed. It didn’t make no difference while I wanted to keep the place, but taxes is so high I have concluded to sell and the man that’s going to buy wants the writings dun to-night or not at all.’

“Failing to get an answer he went on:

“‘Here’s ten dollars. I never could be mean or stingy.

Should have offered it to you before, but I kinder furgot it. But guess it will come handy enough now——'

"As his hope of success lessened by my persevering silence, he forgot the little caution that marked his first words, and stepping nearer me said in a low, hissing voice:

"'Your husband gin me that deed and writ his name on it under that 'ere tall maple, and 'spected you to sign it, and if you was my old gal, you'd just have to.'

"'Harry did not consult me,' I replied.

"'Jest as though a man had got to ask a woman what to do. Here's your ten dollars, so hurry up and write your name rite thar under his'n.'

"He cast a sidelong glance at the window as if to assure himself that no intruder was near and pushed the paper towards me. He came, as to-night, when my grief was overpowering, and his end might be attained. But I was not so hopelessly wretched that I could not speak, and his rude words claimed for a moment my thought, and roused some of the fire of sixteen years long buried beneath the rubbish of life. I had thought to avoid all unnecessary talk, but ere I knew what I was saying I had called him a wretch whose false heart was hidden only by a shred of gauze. 'Once and again,' I said, 'you have gone from me thinking that I did not understand your perfidious nature because my lips were sealed and I refrained from telling you my hatred! But now that you have done all that you can,' and I pointed towards the bed, 'all that a fiend could ask to do, there remains no reason why I should hide my disgust. Think not I have endured the reality to flee before a visionary picture of yours. He who has cared for me in the past will not forsake me now. I have told you that my name should never strengthen the title you may have to my former home. Listen, William Sherman, while I repeat, it shall never be. Now, go from me, I would be alone with my husband.'

"'Shan't be scared or ordered off by such like you and shall stay till I get ready to go.'

"At this point he was interrupted by the return of Mr. Allen, accompanied by Dr. Meags.

"Hastily folding his papers and turning towards me a face livid with rage, he withdrew, muttering as he went:

" 'These laws shall be fixed over so that papers won't have to have any old woman's name to make um right. What right has the like of her to interfere with bizness; the critters couldn't take care of themselves.'

"From that hour I can tell you no more of William Sherman, for I have not spoken with him since till to-night.

"His revenge and hatred are the same, and the changing seasons of half a century would probably leave no evidence of their passing away. With watchful, untiring care he bides his time, but so faithfully was his first work performed there is little of ours which can be brought within his reach.

"Once I feared him, for in his grasp he held my husband, unable to break one link in the chain of evil with which he was bound. But, Annie, that dreadful night severed them all, and while Mr. Sherman listened for the knell of death to be borne to him on the morning breeze, purer spirits, around the great white throne, rejoiced over a repenting sinner and whispered, 'Lo, he prayeth.'

"After many months of care and watching, joy again entered our humble home. Aided by a cane your father walked comfortably, and unwilling to accept an unpleasant truth, he trusted he would again go forth with a step firm and proud as it had been in more youthful days. But that was too much. Renewed in spirit and life, he has been spared to us many years; but he has suffered much and must always be an invalid."

CHAPTER IV.

*Let us, then, be up and doing,
With a heart for any fate;
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labor and to wait.*

—LONGFELLOW.

*Labor is life!—'Tis the still water faileth;
Idleness ever despaireth, bewaileth.*

—MRS. OSGOOD.

WHISTLING November had withered every bright flower, and seared the last green thing which had sought to prolong an existence in some protected nook, or beneath a sheltering rock. Cold and hard, it had relentlessly hunted out and destroyed; then, through a few sunny days, smiled with a bright warm face on its completed work, ere with its sister months, it should be driven to the receding past. Tempted by the Indian summer day, Harry Wilmot and his wife had left Annie to prepare their evening meal, and had gone to the church-yard, to sit once more by the grave of their child, ere the snows of winter should rest heavily upon it.

"My baby brother," said Annie Wilmot, as she held back her young brother, as he was about starting in pursuit of his parents, to join them in their walk.

"Why do you call me baby? I am twelve years old and still 'tis baby Ned and baby brother. I won't be called so any longer."

"Twelve years old," repeated Annie thoughtfully, "but you are very small and frail—then you have been sick so much."

"What if I have been sick? Papa is sick all the time, yet you never call him baby. As for being so very small, I am growing big every day. Mamma says I have grown two inches within the last six months. You see if I keep on, there is a fair promise of my being as large as that Bible king Og, that papa was telling of."

"And how large was he?" asked the sister, wishing to test the memory of her brother, as it had been several months since in a Bible lesson this Bashan king had been discussed.

"Do not just know, but he must have been quite a fellow. His iron bedstead was fifteen feet long and seven wide. My room will hardly accommodate that kind of a bed. Shall have to get it built out under the stars, with the bright, pretty clouds for a covering."

"Well, big or small, we wish you to be a good man and that you know does not depend on the amount of avoirdupois."

"Perhaps not always. But don't your much quoted history say that Daniel Webster was the first statesman in America? and he was a big man and had a large brain—a storeroom for more ideas than you women ever thought of;" and with a sly wink at his sister the boy dashed from the room and across the field in the direction taken by Mr. and Mrs. Wilmot.

"My poor pet," murmured Annie, as she gazed after the receding figure. "How noiselessly has he slipped from my arms, and now, more of a man than I dreamed, so soon to go from the protection of love and tenderness, and be lost in the mart of an ever surging, restless humanity, with none to protect him from the poisoned arrows of fate. May heaven throw around its panoply of innocence and truth."

For many weeks Annie had lived in the dreamland where

castles were built, only to topple over before their completion. For years friends had helped them to such light work as the family were able to do. This, with the strictest economy, and a small legacy left to her mother by a distant relative, had kept the wolf from the door. But the time had come when she felt her youth and health must be devoted to some profitable employment. She would not be satisfied to do her best every day, and leave the event to One who doeth all things well. No! no! All her life she had been governed by circumstances. Now, circumstances must be controlled by her. If opportunities did not come she must go forth and seek them out, even from the high-ways and hedges. At this time, quite alone with her own thoughts, she dwelt bitterly on the past, and the sight of a nearly empty pantry was in no way calculated to soothe and encourage. A tear dropped on her hand and served to rouse her from her reveries.

"Crying," she murmured, as she hastily wiped her wet cheek, "when I know it will not change the past or smooth the future." If tears can be a solace when alone, they would be a dire confusion at any other time.

A bright fire was laid on the well brushed hearth, where it crackled and snapped, thus laughing at its own fancied music, while its warm, dancing light seemed to challenge a happy response from the late sad and dispirited face of Annie Wilmot.

But hark—a stifled cry from the outside intrudes on the stillness—and thinking only of Edward, that he might have returned with a bruised knee or bleeding nose, the sister hastened to open the door. There, instead of her brother, she met a thinly clad woman, her face careworn and blue with cold. With her were two small girls, one hiding behind her mother, while the younger stood closely by her side, grasping the thin and faded shawl. A glance and Annie understood it all. A destitute mother, and two starving children. Thought goes with the rapidity of lightning. Hers instantly flew to the empty cup-

board, but when the tear-stained face of the little one was turned to her own, and in a sweet and almost baby voice said in choked words: "I am so cold and hungry, too, and so is mamma and Annette," all personal matters vanished, and the needy family were led to a comfortable seat by the kitchen fire.

There is a pathetic eloquence in that silent sorrow which can find no words to express the depths of its grief. Till now Mrs. Barlow—for that was the stranger's name—had spoken no word, and the silence was becoming embarrassing till the loosened tongues of the children broke in part the monotony as they shyly walked around the small kitchen which had become to them an ideal palace—too young to realize the sorrows of the past—too young to peer anxiously into the future.

From a high window Annie watched for her own returning party, and when they appeared far down the street, walked slowly out to meet them and relate the circumstances which had brought to their fireside the family of a stranger. She had taken but a few steps when she noticed her young brother in advance of the others, flitting towards her with something like the lightness and speed of a young antelope. As he reached her side, panting from his unusual exercise, he said in a guarded voice, "A circus, Annie, and you have lost the parade."

"Oh, Wildcap, tell us what you mean."

"Well, when I was crossing the field to come up with papa, I met Old Bill."

"Eddie!"

"Yes, I mean Old Bill on a load of meadow hay, standing up and holding on to his pitchfork. I would have gone my way in silence, but he just roared at me and said: 'I looked just like my father, Jacob Cowkan, that ragged Jew down at the corner. That Harry Wilmot was a drunken cuss—but my father Jacob was enough sight meaner.' I am a little fellow, as you told me, but just then I was mad enough for a six footer, so I picked up the first stone I could get and threw it."

"Not at William Sherman," said Annie, while real annoyance was depicted on her face.

"Yes, at Old Bill himself. Would you have me stand 'neath the spouting of that home-made volcano, patiently as 'Mary's little lamb'? Not I. Your baby brother is not made that way.

"Then just tell me, sister mine, if your old King David didn't throw stones. But he understood the art better than I, for somehow I failed of the mark; the stone shied, or something, and hit the nigh horse, and of course he jumped like a kangaroo. Old Bill wasn't prepared for this freak, and over he went, bouncing on the ground like a great rubber ball. Guess it didn't hurt him much, as he picked himself up readily, and seeing his hired man had stopped the horses, he turned his attention to me. I led the race, and you know those clogs he wears are so long and heavy, he could get a foot up and down again only at stated intervals; while my smaller feet and tightly fitting shoes gave me a telling advantage and I was soon out of harm's way."

"Supposing he had caught you?"

"I might have said a short chapter in Lamentations, but you see he didn't catch me. Please not tell mamma, it may make her look sober, but you know she always told us to keep even with the world, and I might as well begin now."

When young America had finished his recital he dashed away in high glee, leaving his sister to see her parents and prepare them to meet a stranger in the home. Mrs. Wilmot walked hastily forward, while Annie detained her father by laying her hand gently on his arm.

"Father," she said, and her voice was soft and musical, "I have been thinking that William Sherman said one true word at the time he made us that social call, the night that you were out."

Harry Wilmot could never hear the name of his old enemy without evincing a shade of sadness. A moment's silence and then in a tremulous voice he asked:

"If that man has spoken one true word, what is it?"

"He said I was 'old and big enough to earn my own living.' The more I think of it, the more positive the impression that he was right."

"William Sherman has in the past had enough to do with our domestic affairs. We may as well drop him and manage to suit ourselves."

"But I do not think we manage very shrewdly, at least I do not. My thought has run in the wrong channel, having been given wholly to home lessons and the book work you have given me. I did not realize I had other duties, in other directions, till the scathing words of that bad man started a little life in my dormant soul and gave me new ideas. He of course intended it all for evil, but if the arousing shall prove of lasting benefit the designed insult will prove like the victory snatched from defeat by the brave general."

"Oh, my sweet girl, do not seek to extract honey from a poisonous plant. That man has no fine sensibilities, no love of kindred ties. Greed and revenge have been the ruling passions of his wretched life. Forget his words and do the best you can every time, remembering that as ye sow, so shall ye reap."

"This may be so, yet no hope of reward, no expectations, that after many days the bread cast on the waters would be returned—would ever incite me to a good or generous act, for I see little difference in the worldly prosperity of the good and the God-forsaken wretch who gathers to himself the widow's mite and the bread of the orphan child."

"You are too young to dwell on these hard problems; be content a little longer, and never forget that a woman should glory in the influence of a pure and gentle life."

For a moment Annie's brow contracted, but she answered quietly:

"Pure always—but the gentle creature you men so much admire hardly meets my idea of fitness. There are times in the life of every girl when energy and self-reliance are essential. Why

not teach that from the beginning, instead of so much gentle dependence?"

"As a demand creates a supply, so the necessities of a case would probably call to the front the required energy. Few would care to be taught in advance."

"If there are any latent energies, why not have them developed, and girls as well as boys be taught to meet the difficulties before us with decision? But we are drifting from the question."

"Can my Annie no longer trust that Providence, that, as a pillar of fire has gone before us in all the past?"

"Oh, yes, as the general told his soldiers: 'Trust in God, but keep the powder dry.' Trust in the great Helper, when we can do no more ourselves; but while we have health and opportunity, we have no right to ask or expect any intervention of a higher Power. This is not a choice, but a necessity, and why should not your wiser counsel direct my inexperienced feet?"

Scarcely restraining the tears, Mr. Wilmot replied: "Annie, my own, I have given this subject too little thought to decide in your favor."

The father had no wish to prolong a conversation that had surprised him by its thoughtful seriousness, convincing him also that he did not understand his child. Without a more direct answer he looked tenderly in her face till the silence became disagreeable, but was ended by a summons to tea by the silvery voice of Eddie. In a lower key he asked very earnestly:

"Don't you think, Annie, that poor woman in the house has the prettiest little girl you ever saw? So pink and white, such great blue eyes and curly hair. Isn't she splendid?"

"Our baby Ned must be careful and not fall in love before he parts friends with his cradle. I hardly noticed your much admired child, while the glance I had left no impression of uncommon loveliness."

"Baby Ned and the cradle again. Didn't I tell you I would not be called so. I am twelve years old, now remember. What

makes you always so sedate and serious? Wonder your long face, and sober, meditative air don't lead you straight to the pulpit, where such things belong. If all the kingdoms of the earth were marshalled before you in their holiday gowns, you might possibly say 'quite pretty,' then your eyes would gaze so far away and take on a look that is just exasperating. Papa, should Annie talk so provokingly dull about that pretty little girl?"

"You seem to forget that I have not seen the little one in dispute." Then taking the hand of Eddie, Mr. Wilmot and his children entered their humble home.

CHAPTER V.

*Nobly dare the wildest storm
Stem the hardest gale;
Brave of heart and strong of arm,
You will never fail.
When the world is cold and dark,
Keep an aim in view
And toward the beacon-mark
"Paddle your own canoe!"*

SWEET young childhood, with present wants supplied, is speedily transformed from fretfulness to mirthful good humor. Thus it proved with the children of Mrs. Barlow when they had been warmed and fed in Mrs. Wilmot's kitchen. Not so with the mother, whose troubled face wore an expression of pain, which the kindest words of her new friends could not dispel.

She did not mourn the loss of great possessions, for she had never been fondled in the arms of luxury, or fed from the overflowing basket of plenty. But she had been rich where others had been poor—rich in undivided possession of her husband's love, happy by that hearthstone where discord had never sown its first seed of bitterness.

Consumption, that scourge of our New England climate, crept stealthily to the humble abode and the husband's steps grew feeble in the presence of this most deceitful foe. Yet not till the angel of hope had furled her wings beyond the storms of

life, did Mrs. Barlow think how sad a thing it was to be poor; how dreadful to see the lamp of life each day burning more dimly, and know the last dollar had been given for food; how terrible to sit alone, watch and wait through the awful gloom, for the midnight cry.

Having been for a long time isolated from her own family, and the friends of her husband living in a distant State, there was no relative to whom she might look for aid, in this hour of her sorest need. She had neighbors, but they approached her with words from which her mother's heart recoiled, for she could not trust to another the jewels Heaven had committed to her care. She could not give away her children; could not rob her heart of its joyous first-born, and doom its noisy laugh to the uncertain welcome of a stranger's home. Nor could she yield her baby—sweet image of its dying father.

She knew there were none to whom she could look for aid, yet resolved by her own effort to avert the threatening ills, while her children should be bound more closely to herself and each other, as they learned to understand more fully the nature of a mother's love.

A few more weeks of suffering were assigned to the husband and father. Then a single mourner rested her head on the fresh turf she had placed with care on a new-made grave.

On that sacred mound she knelt long, till the stars shone in their twinkling light, and the dew rested on every blade of grass. Then rising and looking up she murmured:

*"Let the shortening chain draw me nearer
The Father of the orphan and Friend of the forsaken."*

She had done what she could, and wrapping her shawl more closely around her, she went forth from the congregation of the dead. This stricken one was Alice Barlow. The plans she had formed while keeping her nightly vigils by the couch of her hus-

band were about to be executed. She had seen him buried, their little all had been sold, and their small indebtedness promptly adjusted. This done, she had her first leisure for a moment's thought. Instinctively she shrank from the prospect, almost detecting a wish that she had not undertaken a scheme promising so many hardships and disappointments.

"But my children," she thought, "could never be happy without a mother's love. For them I can endure all things."

With a trembling hand she drew from her pocket a purse in which was deposited her remaining mite. She was not ignorant of the amount at her disposal, but oh! if there could be some mistake! A little more would do her so much good. Poor woman, count it as she would there were only three dollars. With her cheek a shade paler, she replaced it in the purse.

"Only three dollars," she mused, as she anxiously thought of the much she would accomplish with that paltry sum.

"There is no other way," she at length said half aloud, "my trunk is small; Charles Stickney goes to Bradford every day; he will take it with his team and we must walk. 'Tis eighteen miles; still I would not mind the distance on my own account, but poor Annette and little Aggie! Yet this is the best I can do. We must try. Three dollars will just buy our tickets for Lewiston—and oh! what then?"

Mrs. Barlow was not a faint-hearted woman, and, having decided what to do, called at once on Charles Stickney, who kindly took the trunk, promising to leave it where it could be easily found on her own arrival at Bradford.

When the morning light called to new life and activity, Mrs. Barlow, little Agnes and Annette had started on their long and weary journey.

Under the leafless branches of an elm, by the roadside, the widow and her children ate their frugal dinner. When the sun looked towards the west they again went slowly on in the direction of Bradford, which place they hoped to reach at the end of

the second day. But when they learned on the evening of their first day's journey that only six of the eighteen miles had been passed, the mother thought of the remaining twelve with a touch of doubt and discouragement. Not that her trust was shaken, not that she faltered in her purpose so deliberately formed, but already the shades of night were creeping around, and the stars, so welcome to the traveller, would soon send forth their soft, twinkling light; but where was the couch for the weary limbs of her little ones; where the morsel that should appease their hunger? There is a voice "that tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," and its milder breeze came to her in that sad moment lighting with new hope and faith her future way. Looking in the face of Mrs. Wilmot, she spoke in simple words of her previous life and her intention to resume her walk the next day, adding, "If my children can only reach Bradford I have felt the worst would be over, yet our hopes and expectations are at best uncertainties. If that difficulty is overcome I may find greater troubles in embryo."

"Have you ever been in Lewiston?" asked Mrs. Wilmot, her earnest face expressing the anxiety she felt.

"Never, nor have I ever spent any time in a large town. My home has been in the country and I regret that anything should call me away from its cooling breeze and spring-time green."

"Are you going quite alone, not expecting to meet a friend on your arrival?"

"I have no acquaintances in the place, and consequently shall find myself a stranger in the midst of an unknown people."

"Allow me to ask," continued Mrs. Wilmot, "why do you go to Lewiston, closely woven as the trip seems to be, with unpleasant things to yourself?"

"Unpleasant, I know, and I must expect to meet unpleasant things, whichever way I turn. For me it might be more disagreeable to remain. I go in search of work and shall not refuse the hardest service, if it brings food to myself and chil-

dren. 'Tis a manufacturing town, and I cannot fail of finding some kind of employment that will be profitable."

"Such courage can hardly be thwarted in its purpose," answered Mr. Wilmot, who had thus far remained a listener, "but does it never flag in view of the uncertainties to be met in a large town?"

"I try not to think of them; and oh! do not by a word or look discourage me. I cannot bear it now. I can, indeed I must succeed, or what will become of my children?"

"We may help you, at least we will try. Our good Mr. Allen has a brother who has long preached in Lewiston and with half the goodness of heart our neighbor possesses, his acquaintance would be of value. A letter will not be troublesome, even if you do not need it at your journey's end."

Annie's dark eyes sparkled as she exclaimed: "Dear Mr. Allen; why have we not thought of him before? He will be so happy to do you a favor."

"I have," answered Mrs. Barlow, "no claim on his kindness. He may not think it proper to throw on his brother's hands one so entirely unknown."

"I am sure he will think no such thing. He told me within the last week we should regard ourselves as a confederacy, bound together by mutual ties, and in time of need, with mutual claims for assistance. No man is more willing to live up to this rule than he."

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Wilmot, as she saw Annie adjusting her hat, apparently for an outdoor stroll.

"To Mr. Allen's," was the reply. "He abounds in resources, and I am sure he will devise some means by which to help Mrs. Barlow and her children."

"A pleasant walk," added her father, "but don't in your enthusiasm forget the time, and be out till a late hour. We do not wish to notify the authorities of a missing girl."

"Just one little hour," and the happy girl went lightly from

the house, and, going to the street, walked thoughtfully along, scarcely lifting her eyes from the dusty way over which she was passing.

"Just for one moment," she murmured, as she turned from the frequented path to look where a few weeks before had been a flowering hedge. She found its freshness stolen, and its blossoms gone—only the dry and withered stocks remained. Time was precious, and casting a furtive glance to a dark cloud spreading along the west, Annie quickened her pace and was soon beyond the hedge approaching the residence of the Shermans. She had feared an encounter with George, knowing that he habitually practiced his gymnastic exercises on the fence and gates around his father's grounds. On that evening he was not alone, and Annie's steps were lighter as she saw Fred Allen standing between Sherman and herself.

"He will not dare be very rude," she thought. In this reflection she was quickly undeceived by the well known voice, sweet and musical even in its bitter irony.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, drawing the attention of Fred by pointing his finger to Annie. "By Jove, if the queen of the fairies is not out in all her splendor and beauty," and his head bowed in mock obeisance.

"Such an unprovoked insult," spoke Fred, his face betraying both anger and astonishment, "is nothing less than an outrage. I would have more self-respect."

"I respect myself enough to keep out of the poorhouse and shanties of less repute."

"I see. You are pointing more direct to barred doors; be careful there is no hemp in sight."

"Worse than Old Bill himself," remarked Fred as he joined Annie, and quietly took her hand. "With more intelligence than his father, his character is the unadulterated essence of his many mean qualities. His book learning makes him all the more contemptible."

"I am sorry I have been the cause of this quarrel," remarked Annie. "'Tis enough that we should be at enmity without drawing others into the net."

"Give yourself no uneasiness. This is no new affair. In fact we enjoy the full benefit of a row at nearly every meeting. To-night would have proved no exception, even if you had stayed at home, for he had just asked me in a slurring way, 'on what condition the old woman had loosened me from her apron strings.' I had no time to answer, but I have trusted it to a good memory. It will be brought up at the right time for consideration."

Annie was always a welcome visitor at Mr. Allen's, and on this evening was received with unaffected cordiality. The elder Allen laid aside his papers and listened as she repeated the story of Mrs. Barlow; then, without a word, wrote and placed in her hands an unsealed note.

"What is the matter, child?" inquired Mr. Allen, as Annie read and refolded the letter. "Doesn't it suit you? Have I failed to represent your poor woman in satisfactory terms?"

"You have failed in nothing, Mr. Allen. You are very kind, and this is all right. I could not make it better."

"Yet there is something wrong. I see it in your eyes."

"I was thinking what a long twelve miles it is to Bradford."

"Twelve miles, of eight furlongs each, which is no unusual length."

"It will be a long way to Mrs. Barlow and those small children."

Mr. Allen looked mischievously, but did not speak till the young girl's face flushed with embarrassment. Then he smiled at her vexation and said:

"I am sure, Annie, there is something more—some word unsaid. Speak and let us hear it all, while I am in a mood to grant any request."

"Then I am sure you will allow your pretty sorrel from the stable to shorten the weary way to Mrs. Barlow by taking her to

Bradford in season for the first train. Then Fred is such a nice driver."

"There we have it. I could see your intention of helping that woman over the road in some way, if you had to go yourself and carry the smaller one half the distance. There is, however, no need of that; a morning ride will do Fred good. The pony needs the exercise and I am glad I can serve you both so easily."

"Oh, thank you so much."

"But stay, I have something more to say. My dear," he continued, addressing the smiling matron at his side, "these people will need an early breakfast, and who ever heard of travelling with children without a lunch?"

"How thoughtless," said Mrs. Allen, as she left the room, returning soon with a well filled basket which she gave to Fred, at the same time expressing a kind message for Mrs. Wilmot. Annie's hour was waning, and with young Allen for escort she started for home.

"Fred," she said, as they again approached the Sherman's, "why not go the lower road to Bradford to-morrow? By so doing you will avoid meeting and perhaps escape an insult from these amiable neighbors."

"Do you think I will do such a thing? I shall go the old way; they will not understand my errand enough to interfere. If they should, who cares?"

"Mrs. Barlow is poor and her children meanly clad. George Sherman is not the one to let you pass in such company without screaming in your ears of poverty and paupers."

"That would not hurt me. If it would I'd rather meet it than go round and try to dodge unmerited abuse. Never fear a collision in the morning hours. George is not an early riser, and I hope to meet the train with your friends before that sleepy fellow shall crawl from his room."

"If George is indolent, his father does not enjoy that reputation. One is as objectionable as the other. The child follows in

the steps of his sire, repeats the lesson he has been taught. Possibly in looks and general appearance the elder may more closely resemble the half humanities of the dark continent."

"You are getting excited and make strong comparisons."

"Strictly true; too tame, if anything."

"What ails you?" asked Fred, evidently displeased at these positive manifestations. "I thought you incapable of retaining strong prejudices and dislikes. You used to tell me of pity, where one could not respect; love, where there was no hope of inspiring such a sentiment in return, which is about what we should expect and admire in one like your own quiet self."

"I am sorry," replied Annie, "to forfeit the good opinion of my friends. You dislike the Shermans because you see in them nothing to inspire a better sentiment. With greater aggravations my feelings are more intense and bitter. To speak honestly, for Wm. Sherman I can have no milder feeling than contempt, as one who mentally and physically emanated from the refuse thrown out in the creation of all things in sea or on the land."

Fred fairly stopped breathing in utter astonishment, and Annie could not see his face as he said: "Suspend judgment. Evolution may not be done with him yet."

Then he thought as they walked slowly on: "I have not understood her in all these years. Considering the past she cannot be blamed, but as I am not anxious for further disclosure, I will speak no teasing word as a provocation."

When they stood by the cottage door, Fred delivered his basket, then heard the good-night of Annie as she crossed the threshold, and thought as he turned homeward:

"How strange and indefinable the habitually quiet woman—bearing long, enduring much and patiently, but better wake the tornado than stir to their source the deep still waters of her thinking soul."

With the dawn of another day the Wilmots were stirring. While Annie and her mother cared thoughtfully for their guest,

Mr. Wilmot divided his time between the frolicsome Annette, now wild with joy at the prospect of a morning ride, and the grateful mother, whose tears rested as a thank-offering with her new-made friends, while her silent heart looked beyond to the Disposer of human events—the Dispenser of every earthly good.

From a well arranged breakfast they were hurried by the rattling of wheels and the clear voice of Fred Allen as he reined his prancing nag before the door of Annie's humble home. Mrs. Barlow and her children were soon seated and nicely wrapped in the warm shawls and robes provided for the greater comfort of their ride. Then came a crack of the whip and the well-fed sorrel of Mr. Allen went dancing from the yard. As they came in sight of the Sherman residence, according to Annie's supposition the night before, the elder man, with his carefully carried rifle, was out, and from the four points of the compass squinting through the branches of the tall maple in quest of a midnight intruder, whose constant whoa, whoa, had disturbed his usually quiet slumber.

The sharp noise of wheels drew his attention from the tree, to see Fred Allen and his unknown companions flying over the road.

"Wonder where Fred found that lot of ragamuffins. A knot of tramps, no doubt, fished out of the Wilmot hovel, in course. Mighty strange that boy can't look higher. If he was mine I guess——"

Here his cogitations came to a sudden pause, for in some way not yet understood his gun went off, and as it was pointed to the east, where the sun was just rising in sight above the pine-crowned hills, the astonished man looked a moment at the piece still resting on his arm and then exclaimed:

"Trying to shoot the sun, are you? Think you hit the mark, you old blunderbuss?" Then shading his eyes with his hand he turned a questioning look to the bright luminary, and seeing no gunshot wound, went on:

"Wasted a whole barrellful of buckshot. Yes, skeared that owl off to ile up for another night's serenade, when I was kalker-lating fer his karkis fer a pot-pie fer my dinner; nothing like it with a sprinkling of onions and kian. Can't tell just how, but there will be a way fer Fred to pay fer that 'ar shot, pot-pie and all, in course thar will. If he had been at home instead of toting off with a lot of gypsy snags, it wouldn't er took place." One more look in the direction of the vanishing team, a question as to its destination, "poorhouse like as not," and then with a loitering step, and a dark, unhappy frown on his face, this man of evil thought and wishes entered his own home, a home which his unholy craft and wicked temptation had stolen from a weaker and unsuspecting brother.

In the meantime on went the party to Bradford, accomplishing the twelve-mile trot in season to get the trunk taken there the day before by Charles Stickney and secure tickets for Lewiston ere the iron horse halted, as was his wont in his daily course to the distant towns. With Agnes in his arms and Annette clinging to her mother, Fred led the way to a passenger car, and having secured for them an unoccupied seat, was making his hasty bow, when he encountered the keen gaze of a stranger, well dressed and in manner gentlemanly, yet evidently caring less for him than the unprotected Mrs. Barlow and her frightened children.

There was no time to ask or receive an explanation, the train was already in motion. As Fred jumped to the platform a last glance through a window of the passing car showed him the portly figure of the strange man, his eyes still resting on the features of Fred's late companion.

"Too bad," muttered Fred, "that she must go alone."

Then, because he could do nothing better, he tried to imagine some possible relationship that might exist between the two.

"Had they met before? perhaps been pupils in the same country school, or in some other way and place had seen and known

each other?" But the careworn face of Mrs. Barlow, her every garment betokening poverty, and her crying Agnes were not largely calculated to invite the renewal of early acquaintance, and were even a less inducement for the formation of a new friendship in a crowded railway car.

Unable to solve the mystery, he carried back the unpleasant picture to mar with its shadows many of his thoughtful moments.

Could he have read the conflicting hopes and fears which drew that unknown man from his seat; could he have felt the throbbing heart, and anon listened for its pulsation, almost stayed by intense anxiety, as, forgetful of all else, he tried to find some unmistakable index to remove every doubt from that familiar yet changed and haggard face—could he have seen and felt all this—more of hope than fear would have linked itself with Mrs. Barlow and her fatherless babes.

CHAPTER VI.

*Hard are life's early steps, and but that youth
Is buoyant, confident and strong in hope,
We should behold its threshold and despair.*

—LONDON.

EDDIE WILMOT had ever been a frail and delicate child, whose plaintive wail and languid step drew around him more closely the arms of love, as if they would hold back from its native sky the little spirit of their lent treasure. He had reached his twelfth year, pale and slender, when the first frosts of winter revived his old enemy, and through the dark watches of many nights he moaned in the helpless agony of rheumatic fever. Like some ministering angel Annie lingered around his couch till the little sufferer thought less of the beautiful Nina, regarding with newly awakened love the plainer face of his remaining sister. At length the disease had run its race and the cheerful voice of the sister told her still nearly helpless patient that on the morrow she would lift him from his bed—so magical in chilly mornings—but hard the moment we cannot leave them at will. Eddie's convalescence was the signal for renewing Annie's half-perfected plans, which the father had hoped buried beyond resurrection. The present seemed all engrossing. Its duties were so quietly performed, Mr. Wilmot, though armed with the jealousy of love, scarce detected a wandering thought.

"No, my dear," he said as he nervously grasped the hand of his wife, "the gloom of this old house would be intolerable without her—it must not be."

"But," replied Mrs. Wilmot, "we must not think of ourselves, but what will be the better course for her. She has strong convictions of her own. Ambitious, it may be too much so, but what would be the result of holding her back and crushing these high aspirations? If we can do nothing to help her, let us at least encourage her to help herself. Better be very lonely and endure many heartaches than darken the bright hopes she cherishes for the future."

"But she is so young. Youth can see only the bright and promising side of life.."

"I think she has seen enough to know that life is a struggle, but feels the greatest good is not accomplished by a shrinking inactivity."

"Good-by, old man," said Eddie Wilmot, as Dr. Meags retired from his apartment after pronouncing the young invalid beyond the need of further professional care. "Now, Annie," he said, turning to his sister, "we may be glad and make merry, that shaggy great coat and weather-beaten face have left us, with no promise of to-morrow or the day after."

"My son," interrupted his mother, "you seem to forget that the presence of Dr. Meags has often brought us hope and encouragement. That he has many times left his pleasant home, braved wind and weather, that he might minister to the wants of a suffering little patient. Must he leave with an uncertain blessing?"

"No; but I was so sick; then I was glad to see him—even glad to swallow his nauseous drugs."

"Those who stand by us in adversity and pain should not be so easily forgotten. If they are shoulder to shoulder with us in our weakness, shall we turn from them the first moment we cease to need a helping hand?"

"No, not that. If Dr. Meags would come as other people do

I should wait impatiently for what you call his matter-of-fact face and the recital of his life sketches. But I never should get well with a string of professional visits promised for—well, no one knows how long.”

“Perhaps,” suggested Annie, “if the absence of the doctor proves to you such a miracle of good the departure of your nurse might give another impetus to returning health.”

Here the young girl turned an inquiring look to her mother’s face.

After a moment of hesitation she replied :

“I have known that this hour was near, but is it so very near? Can it be put off no longer?”

Mrs. Wilmot had spoken in a sad, earnest voice, her last words choked by the deep tenderness of a mother’s love.

The subject was not unexpected, but she was strong in the belief that she had schooled herself to a quiet exterior. But there are times when the pent feelings refuse further restraint. Such a moment had been reached by Mrs. Wilmot, and leaning her head on her hand, her tears came to her relief.

Annie’s arms were around her mother’s neck.

“Then you are afraid to trust me lest in my weakness I fail to discern between good and evil? Afraid that when beyond the pale of this healthy influence I shall parley with the serpent’s charms, till your image is driven from my heart? I have seen little of life in its masked treachery, but you have taught me its hidden devices. Shall I forget all this? From familiarity with lesser sins shall I join hands with vice and rest contentedly in the deadly shade of the upas breath?”

As Annie ceased speaking her mother breathed more freely, relieved in a measure of an unpleasant apprehension. She had never doubted her daughter’s good intentions, but might she not be too sanguine, expecting to see truth and virtue more universally reflected? She had thought of the darker way—spoken of temptation, its subtlety, and yet more, had given it range beyond the

Shermans, to whom she had been wont to ascribe and trace nearly all the disagreeable things she had yet encountered. Annie had gained a point and finally the consent of her family. With a lighter heart she commenced preparations for the new life by looking up and canvassing the different departments of labor. There she met with difficulties. Some were quite overstocked, others had only work quite too laborious, but at last, through the kind offices of Mr. Allen, a position was secured with Mrs. Elsworth, an early friend, now an owner in a large millinery establishment in Bradford.

Home-coming is the happiest day of all the seven, but home-leaving, the *first* home-leaving, when all the affections of years are severed, is quite another thing. Even Annie found her courage trembling in the balance as she heard the faltering good-by and God bless you from both father and mother. Then her pet, her darling Eddie, wrestling to be strong, kissed her again and again, then, turning to his mother, tried to smile as he said:

"Mamma, we'll not cry where we shall get no thanks in return. So no more tears for you, Annie," and the next moment was locked in his own little room. But ask the gentle moon that peeped through his low window that night if he kept his last promise to his sister—"No more tears for you, Annie."

"So far all right," remarked Mr. Allen, who had kindly volunteered to take Annie to Bradford in his own private carriage, thus saving the expense of a public conveyance.

"Next we will look for a boarding place. Perhaps try Hollis street. A Mrs. Harmon lives there, with whom I stopped a few days last winter. I found it a good and homelike place. There it is," he said as they approached a neat cottage, "and not more than five minutes' walk from your work."

The bell was answered by Mrs. Harmon in person, who received Mr. Allen with a patronizing air, till she discovered that he wished to obtain board for a young girl instead of himself.

"I could accommodate one or two more men," she said, "but

do not care to take girls. I have two now, whose places I could fill with profit, but as they were sisters of my late husband, dear Mr. Harmon, for whose sake I allow them to stay."

"We will find a wiser woman next time," remarked Mr. Allen as they reached the street. "Mrs. Harmon is a handsome young widow, ambitious, with an eye to the future. It is quite natural that she should prefer men to girl boarders."

"Well, Mr. Allen," asked Annie after they had heard Mrs. Harmon's words reiterated again and yet again by those who would take a few boarders, "do you think they are all pretty young widows?"

"Oh, no; some may be wives, with a tinge of jealousy and dare not risk a domestic upheaval by taking a bright and nice looking girl into the home. We will not be discouraged. Mrs. Elsworth has lived in Bradford a long time; we will go back to the store; she may direct us to better luck."

Retracing their steps, they were soon with Mrs. Elsworth, who, after deliberate thought and many questions, concluded to allow Miss Wilmot to board in her own family and thus become the companion of her only child, a young lady of cultivated selfishness and will, who had inherited quite a fortune from her maternal grandmother and was also heir-apparent to her mother's estate, which would be no inconsiderable matter.

An apprenticeship of weeks, rewarded with what food her homesick appetite might crave, was not marked in its providential design to meet present exigencies. Annie Wilmot, who wanted money to-day, could hardly feel satisfied.

"But," she said, "this is not a choice but a necessity. 'Tis a step in the right direction. I will do my best."

With thoughts like these she entered on her new work with a will that promised success, and none could see that her heart was reaching for Mrs. Barlow, whose zeal and indomitable courage had done much to inspire her present high aim and holy effort. No proposal of this kind could be brought to bear on the minds

of her friends, who had heard nothing from the widow and her little ones since Fred Allen left them at Bradford, under circumstances which gave rise to the most unpleasant speculation. Only Annie had an eye of faith sufficiently strong to look through these obstacles and behold her reaping the reward of persevering effort.

Four weeks from the time that Annie entered the service of Mrs. Elsworth, George Sherman dragged himself lazily up the steps leading to a neat cottage located on a retired street in Bradford. It was the temporary home of Annie Wilmot and residence of her employer. The arrival was not an unusual occurrence, though his indolence and lounging familiarity would have proved to the penniless student or artisan an uncertain passport to the well ordered parlors of Mrs. Elsworth.

Wealth hides behind her golden screen immeasurable faults, and the ill-gotten gains of the elder Sherman had bought for the son a footing in society quite above the vitiated habits of his heart and life. In this unnatural atmosphere he floated without giving or receiving those blessings for which all were designed when placed in this beautiful world by Him who created man in His own image.

In appearance George Sherman was the counterpart of his sire. The same squinting grey eye and unpleasant curl of the lip. A tall, angular figure, overtopped with a profusion of bushy hair. He was neither good looking nor agreeable, yet possessed one redeeming quality. He had a voice of unusual pathos and power—deep, musical and inspiring. Had he not loved laziness for its own sake it might have proved to him the magic of a Demosthenes, or the enchanting sceptre of our own Patrick Henry. But in his breast there lived no lofty aspiration. The future could hold out to him no tempting palm, while his imbecile mind contented itself with present ease and the hope of inherited wealth.

For change and a glimpse of town life no place was better suited to his selfish nature than the pleasant residence of Mrs.

Elsworth, who anticipated his every wish with an eye to the inheritance of an only son.

The spoiled pet of the household was never pleased with her mother's plans; and on this occasion heard with ill grace the request to sing his favorite song and for his entertainment wake from their silence the notes of her long-neglected piano. Just as the noonday lunch was announced, Sherman, from his lounging position, saw Annie Wilmot trip lightly through the yard to a door in the rear of the house. In a moment his evil genius was awake and active.

"Is that Annie Wilmot?" he asked.

"Of course it is, and what of it?"

"She is a miserable beggar and undeserving a shelter in any decent house."

These words were inopportune, for, to do the lady Hortense justice, she loved and admired, so far as she was able, the gentle, unassuming Annie.

"And what are you," she retorted, "coming here uninvited, with a tongue set on fire by the unquenchable blaze of—slander——" (this was not the word she wished) but she went on: "Shelter her—indeed we will, not only against the inclement weather, but against the vile aspersions of falsehood and calumny——"

At this point Mrs. Elsworth entered the room. Her practised eye saw the storm that was raging and she gazed with questioning look till Hortense, with a defiant smile, answered her unspoken wish.

"Yes, mamma, I am angry, very angry, but not without a cause. I hope you are now at liberty to entertain your distinguished visitor, not a very grand or well paying exercise, as my late experience can witness," and with these words she left her mother's parlor to sit by the side of Annie Wilmot and tell her of the arrival of George Sherman and the usual quarrel following

his coming. Poor Annie was bewildered, and with trembling voice she asked :

"Did you say that George Sherman was here?"

"Of course I did, though I could wish him at the equator hunting lizards. But what ails you, and where are you going?" as she saw Annie preparing to leave without her dinner.

"I do not want a lunch now; a later dinner will be sufficient," and she left the house, hastily retracing her steps to the store.

While Hortense was speaking thus plainly of their guest the mother was seeking by many excuses to repair the damage of the last hour.

Sherman, annoyed by the passionate words of the angry girl, refused to be pacified; but, clinging to the chance to injure an innocent victim, he proposed to think of the hasty words of Hortense as only a folly, with no ill intent, if she would send Annie away that very night.

Mrs. Elsworth was a mother, and her whole soul shrank from this proposal.

"Dear me," she replied, "you cannot have thought of the result to which your advice might lead," but her words were of entreaty rather than decision. "You see," she added, holding up her small watch for inspection, "the last stage for your place left here an hour ago. Annie is a stranger here and may be destitute of money. It might be very unpleasant hunting lodgings after nightfall. Then, again, Hortense might not see the necessity of so much haste."

"A note to Annie, dismissing her at once, will accomplish the object, and Hortense will know only when too late to interfere."

Mrs. Elsworth, quite against her better nature, weakly allowed this plan to go on, but as the door closed on the small boy who had been entrusted with this message to Annie, Hortense appeared fitted for an outdoor trip, and holding in her hand a small lunch basket.

"My dear," said the mother, "you are not going out on this wintry day to tempt a new cold."

"Why not? I have not usually been caged or cooped when I wished to go out."

"Not compelled, but, remember your lungs are very sensitive to cold."

"I am well protected with cloak and furs."

"We had thought of a drive round town," said George, who had been attracted by their words, "and your company will be indispensable."

"I am quite too delicate," replied Hortense. "Invalids should avoid night air."

Then bestowing on her mother and George a look proud and defiant she passed from the hall to the open air. The fire of passion paled a little as triumph flashed from her eye and a smile of scorn played around a mouth of exquisite beauty.

The note sent by George Sherman was but a few steps in advance of Miss Elsworth, and she received it at the door of her mother's store and thought of the double happiness of which she would be the bearer to her quiet friend.

"Ah, my Lady Runaway," said Hortense, as she seated herself by the low chair occupied by Annie.

"You see I have brought you some dinner, a favor of which you have proved yourself unworthy by a rapid retreat, running without a pursuer. Mamma's long-eared favorite is not classified with the fleet of foot, and here is a precious little note, handed me as I came along. What perfect chirography. No doubt the author is equally unexceptional."

Hortense became silent as she noticed the flush on Annie's cheek while she perused the unexpected sheet. When the last word had been read she crumpled it in her small hand and in reply to the inquiring look of her gay friend replied:

"Your unexceptional writer is George Sherman, sending this

with your mother's approval, and requesting me to find some other home this very night."

"Impossible! Only yesterday mamma told me what entire satisfaction you were giving and that you would soon have a paying position. If she has been coaxed to do such a mean thing as this she shall repent it."

"Oh, Hortense, she is your mother. Be respectful and judge her with lenity."

"And what about George Sherman?"

"George Sherman has been the bane of my life. He would ruin me beyond the hope of redemption. He would crush me and see me the miserable being over whom he might triumph. Nothing short of my wholesale ruin would satisfy him or his more detestable father. But it shall not be; never."

"Oh, Annie," said the really amazed Hortense, "are you indeed so very angry? All would expect just such a breeze from me, as a matter of course. But who ever dreamed you had one bit of temper?"

"No matter about dreams now. You see if I lack temper, as you please to term it, I have something that does finely as a substitute on occasions like this."

"But you will not go away to-night?"

"Indeed I shall!"

"But where will you go at this hour?"

"I do not know, but I shall surely leave at once," and as she ceased speaking she quietly took her wraps and passed from the store closely followed by the bewildered Hortense.

"Zounds! if there is not Fred Allen and Miss Hortense—always appearing at the wrong time, and there, too, is your Annie Wilmot at the other gate. A fine little matter this," exclaimed George Sherman, as he threw himself impatiently on the sofa and gave his hostess a look which betokened his willingness to retire at once from active service.

Mrs. Elsworth had only time to say "How very unfortunate,"

when Hortense, accompanied by young Allen, entered the parlor.

Mrs. Elsworth had taken a step in the wrong direction, she had sown the wind and must reap the whirlwind. She saw at a glance that her hope of seeing Hortense the mistress of the Sherman property as well as the Elsworth, had vanished in smoke, while George could see with equal clearness that the beautiful Hortense and her large possessions had slipped through his fingers forever.

The first civilities exchanged, a word ventured about the weather and business items which had brought Fred to town, then the most embarrassing silence ensued till Annie announced herself ready for the homeward trip. Following Annie to the door, Hortense kissed her a fond good-by, then returned lightly to the parlor.

"Mamma," she said as she gazed almost scornfully in her face, "you often tell me of my shortcomings, but never in my life have I done a thing half so shameful as this. Uninfluenced, your kind heart would not have done it, but you knew better, and you, George Sherman, from the first I thought I could read you as an open book—your selfish hypocrisy—but I did not give you credit for anything so low as this. But you have played your last card and lost.

"We hope you will find it quite convenient to leave at an early hour, as mamma and I wish to be alone."

These were very tame words for Hortense, but they were plainly understood, and George Sherman, cheered by the hysterical sobs of Mrs. Elsworth, went out, to return no more as a welcome guest.

CHAPTER VII.

Struggle—thou are better for the strife and the very energy shall hearten thee.—TUPPER.

FRED ALLEN was the only son of the village merchant ; the petted though not spoiled child of love and plenty. Generous and impulsive, he was ever happy when contributing to the enjoyment of others, while sympathy for the unfortunate seemed of spontaneous growth in his warm young heart. With a mind given, perhaps, too much to metaphysical thought, he would spend hours in a kind of mazy wonder, that the creative hand should scatter such a diversity of gifts, endowing some with a Godlike intellect, while others were sent adrift on the ocean of life with a mind little above the beasts that perish. Perish? Do they perish? where is the dividing line? Then why the suffering that from the cradle to the grave often wraps as with a mantle earth's best and truest in direst sorrow and woe? As he could reach no comprehensive view, this chain of thought only led him to a labyrinth too dark and winding to admit one ray of light. Young Allen had known the Wilmots from babyhood ; that the father had fallen from the first offices of trust which the village could offer to the degradation of intemperance. Whence came that cloud that had darkened his sun ere it had reached its zenith and blighted with sad memories all his later life? Where was the author—the first and real author—of this woe? Abroad, flourishing as the green bay tree and looking complacently on a

train of calamities which had brought to him no evil in their wake.

He thought of the legend of St. Verona, whose gentle goodness so enraged his Satanic majesty he would fain have crushed her with a weight of stone but a slight error carried the stone to his own toes. But would the instigator of so much trouble so far forget himself as to drop the stone, so long poised over the Wilmots, on himself? With a doubtful shake of the head he mused:

"These Sherman chickens are a long while coming home to roost, but they may get there; 'the mills of the gods grind slow.'"

The Wilmot children had been his early playmates and the beautiful Nina his ideal of loveliness.

Annie he did not so well understand.

Till he had listened to her severe and bitter censure of the Shermans he had considered her the model of amiability; that had given him flashing glimpses of a strong, deep passion. She had not the confiding, trustful nature of her sister, and he dared not seek to penetrate a reserve and diffidence she at times manifested towards her best friends. But in their everyday life he forgot these little strange things, seeing only the obliging companion whose cheerful looks never yielded to depression, but, with courage rising with her necessities, struggled on through the winter of her many ills.

Only four weeks had the young girl been in Bradford when Fred so unexpectedly met her in its streets, the objectionable sheet in her hand and much too excited to see the many difficulties that might gather around her.

"Ah!" thought he, as he listened to Annie's rehearsal and read the note penned by George, "why should the Sherman family hunt with such intolerable hate and abuse one whose path is rough enough at best?"

Young Allen would gladly have taken in his puny hand the chastising rod, forgetting that vengeance belongeth to One who will repay in His own good time and manner.

"I cannot," he reflected, "inflict deserved punishment. but I can bring to naught the counsels of those leagued with mischief, by taking Annie to the hospitable home of my parents, where, I doubt not, some means will be devised for her future aid and encouragement."

The hour was late as they neared their native village, yet kind-hearted Mr. Allen and his wife waited the return of their son, and greeted the poor girl who came back with him with cordial, pleasant words. The mother, while preparing their late supper, avoided all questions which might add to the pallor of that face whose expression made unmistakable revelations of some painful passage in life's history.

The sensitive child had no wish for food, and, pleading extreme weariness, retired to her assigned apartment, where she sank wearily on a low stool and covered her face with her hands.

A feeling something like disgust stole over her as she compared herself to the "King of France who, with fifty thousand men, marched up the hill and then marched down again." Four weeks ago she had left that place, bright and hopeful, and in so short a time had got back to the starting point, no better off, unless a trifle wiser from her sad experience. Ah, yes, and four weeks wasted, because that time might have been better improved.

Those who have known want only in the careworn face of another may tell 'tis a blessing because it will call to life and develop every latent energy, but Annie thought it had other qualities, that it could curtail, if not destroy, by its privations, its obstacles and its discouragements.

Youth and health cannot long struggle in the slough of despond, and the young girl's better self soon told her that effort was what might bring success, though it might prove a lifelong endeavor. Raising her bowed head she mused:

"But what shall I do? My shop work has proved an unfortunate failure; for general housework I am not sufficiently strong, while at the one printing office in our village there are a dozen

names entered before mine. If I could get a small school—but the wages would be insufficient. Experienced teachers get but little; those unused to teaching would command less. Then, who would send their children for instruction to the daughter of Harry Wilmot? The Shermans would never allow it. I see but one avenue—a cotton mill. Since every energy of body and mind must be drugged and centred on the question of bread and butter, mother must not be too particular. I think she will consent. She must think of Harriet Farley, daughter of a talented minister, Lucy Larcom, the favorite of our own Whittier, Martha Dodge, with her progressive ancestry, and many others who were successful as mill girls, and why not I?

"Yes, I shall go to Lewiston," she continued with a determined air, while she hastily undressed, then retired to the comfortable bed on which she had lain so many times before. "I shall be away from the Shermans, away from all I hate. Yes, and from all I love, too."

Annie wept over the painful thought till soothed by her own tears and, wearied by anxiety, she slept.

"Poor, dear child, it has been a cruel lesson for her young heart," replied Mrs. Allen, as Fred finished the narration of George Sherman's unmanly conduct. "A comforting word might cheer her. Kindness is sometimes better than money, but Annie, I think, may need both. I will go to her; an assurance of our friendship and disposition to assist her may secure her pleasant dreams and a brighter face at breakfast."

Acting from the kind impulse, the motherly lady went quietly to the side of her sleeping guest. The pale cheek, on which were traces of recent tears, rested on her hand, and discovering that she was really in the arms of Morpheus Mrs. Allen returned in the same noiseless manner to her own room.

The next morning the young girl slept till roused by the merry tinkle of the breakfast bell from the hall below.

One moment she was bewildered, then the disagreeable inci-

dents of the previous day were recalled with painful vividness. Again she closed her eyes and covered her face—not to hide, not expecting to forget, only wishing that memory and thought had not so soon returned.

In this hurrying world there is little time unclaimed by important duties—few moments to be spared to the sickening details of the unpleasant past.

Fearing that she had already trespassed on the systematic promptness of the Allens, Annie made a hasty toilet, then joined her friends in the breakfast-room.

"Annie," began Mr. Allen, as she rose from the table, "you are rested now, and perhaps will sit by me while I reveal a little plot, in which there are too many accomplices to render its safety a sure thing." Here the older Allen sent a meaning look in the direction of his wife and son. "You have got enough of Bradford?"

"Yes, oh, yes!" she answered, and the hot tears would come, though she had thought to be brave and very hard hearted.

"There, child, don't," and she felt a kindly hand resting on her head. "Do not lay it to heart so much. I never quite liked the situation, and if it had been the most desirable, what is one failure? Nothing really worth having is gained by a single effort. No matter how many or how often the defeats, if you have the strength to rise and triumph at last. The more obstinate the battle the happier the conquest. Our great men have walked to eminence in the same thorny way. You remember Xerxes, Alexander, William and Mary, Napoleon, Wellington and our own Washington and——"

"Oh, stop, Mr. Allen, please stop. Of course I remember, but you would not have me go back beyond the dark ages and take a pattern, following in the wake of those cruel old conquerors who loved a conquest of blood, which they crowned with a refined cruelty germinating in the very depth of Hades. And

later, though I revere the name of Washington, I am no fighter. I could not play the Maid of Orleans, if opportunity offered."

"No, Annie, we would not have you follow them, even afar off. Only imitate them in their singleness of purpose, their determined will and unflinching courage. These may be your weapons with which to overcome the many obstacles, both great and small, that are sure to meet us in life's journey."

"Yet none of the instances to which you refer were individual cases, not parallel conditions at all. They were grouped by thousands, and I think, in one example, by millions, all of one mind and a single object in view. Why should not such an army succeed? Why be discouraged at circumstances? If there was a breach in their ranks there were others to close up and press forward. Quite different from the single one, battling—or trying to battle, along the tide of life."

"Yes, my child, but even your reasoning will bring the case down to individual effort and courage. There was to all these armies one controlling spirit, one eye that never swerved from the star of destiny. Yet you may, if you please, take the individual with no magnetic help, no electric spark from kindred souls. We shall not have to go far, perhaps, in our very community—such an angel may be entertained unawares."

"What of James Watt? Did he revolutionize the world by steam with a single effort? And do you think Robert Fulton saw his first steamboat glide up the Hudson without having met with opposition and showers of cold water? And so many more."

"What do you remember of the first sewing machine?"

"Not much—only Elias Howe spent his all in getting it up, then had to work as a deck-hand to get back from England, where he had gone in the interest of his invention. On his arrival here, went into a machine shop as a day laborer, till circumstances favored a different life."

"Yes, and never lost courage. He felt there was a brighter morrow."

"I know, but he did not meet a Sherman at every turn."

"Annie," said Mr. Allen, looking tenderly into her tearful eyes, "if you have been wronged by one individual, do not, from a single injustice, pass condemnation on the whole family of man. Every coat does not cover the unkind, selfish heart of a Sherman."

"I do not think so. Years ago you refuted such an argument by a cloud of witnesses, a multitude of generous deeds. But one exception cannot cure my infidelity in regard to the many."

"Yet it must be cured, and your little obstinate heart taught more confidence. For this purpose we will keep you with us a few weeks; it may be months, if you do not renounce some of your idle whims. Do not look frightened, Puss; this was our decision last night and we shall not make different arrangements."

"But, Mr. Allen, you do not want me. You stand in no need of my services; the situation is offered through pity, only pity."

"If Fred is to go away to school, with an eye to a college course, there are collars, shirts and socks to head the endless catalogue of preparations. Then comes house-cleaning with all its hubbub and change. Does this array of business look like charity?"

"You are very kind," were the only words Annie's tremulous lips could utter.

"Is that all?" inquired Fred, for the first time looking from a journal he had taken from the table.

"By no means, my boy, only one thing at a time." Then the old man turned his arm-chair that he might claim an unobstructed view of Annie's face. "Do not expect too much," he said, "for we are looking to our own interest this time—not yours. My business just now is too prosperous to be curtailed or neglected; nor can I, at my time of life, think of doing all that has been accomplished by myself and Fred. Your father was once a business man—a thorough accountant. If I can secure his services, so much of the time as he may be able to work, with master Ned for an errand boy I shall do very well, hardly missing our Fred, at least in the transaction of trade and office work."

"If father may only answer your purpose," replied Annie, her face lighting with new joy and hope.

"I think he may. I am sure his health will improve as he has something to stimulate and encourage."

"But Eddie, Mr. Allen, is only a baby. You cannot be serious in speaking of him as old enough to be of service to any one?"

"Indeed I am very serious, and far more sensible than his kind, well-meaning sister, who persists in calling the young gentleman a baby, as if he required a supporting hand to aid in his little walks around the house. If he would suffer it I am not sure but you would sing Mother Goose and rock him to sleep till he was twenty."

"Oh, Mr. Allen, to hear you talk one might suppose my poor, little, frail brother had already seen twenty years. I wish I could always rock him to sleep and myself bear all the hard things he must meet in this un pitying world."

"Generous girl," replied Mr. Allen, "could you accomplish what you desire you would not only injure your brother but abuse yourself. 'Tis well it cannot be. He must strike out alone, meet with life's rough and tumble, contend and overcome. I would not overtax the young and fragile boy, yet I would have him, even at this early age, learn to think for himself. He should begin to master smaller difficulties that his strength may be developed for great emergencies. Nor is he too young to learn the first principles of business habits; how, honestly to acquire and properly to spend. You would have him a man, good and respected. Then he must be schooled, ready for opportunities, for, remember, child, they never wait."

"Why not teach these practical lessons to girls instead of the present notions of dependence?" asked Annie.

"Reason enough. A girl has a different mission. She is a kind of inspirator, a half divinity, controlling with a smile and ruling with the power of love."

"I think, Mr. Allen, her smiles and love would be more truly

appreciated if she was known to have a reserve strength ready to meet opposition. Power is a guard against insult—weakness invites it. I would have Eddie numbered ere long with earth's honored ones. Then ask not that any act of mine shall turn aside the blessing by burdening his first tender years."

"Overwork is no part of my plan. Running on errands will be healthy exercise for his young limbs."

Again the sister remonstrated, but Mr. Allen turned from her reasonable scruples more than ever determined. He loved the Wilmots, yet with a stronger tenacity, his own peculiar wishes. Eddie was bright and happy. He knew how like sunshine would be his presence during intervals of hurry and care.

That he might not be out-generalled by the sister, Mr. Allen lost no time in securing an interview with Eddie.

"You will do my errands," he said, "while I will teach you to be a merchant, to buy and sell and some time have a large store of your own."

Then he told him of marseilles and satin and fine broadcloth, once belonging to Fred, but from whose narrow confines his aspiring limbs had stolen in disgust. These should be refitted to suit the smaller person of Eddie.

"More than this, my man," he continued, "from yonder pile of prints you shall choose mamma a dress. Think of it, a little boy like you, buy mamma a dress."

A strange, bright gleam sparkled in the child's soft eyes. Ambition had lighted her treacherous flame and new-born thoughts and hopes lived in the breast of Eddie Wilmot.

The few weeks that Annie was to spend at Mr. Allen's had already flown, imperceptibly; as happy hours go unnoted to the fading past.

Fred had been superseded by the sedate man, while master Ned, claiming his promised clerkship, danced gaily around the grim old store.

Annie, though silent, had never lost sight of Lewiston. When

the favorable moment came she expressed to Mrs. Allen a belief that labor in a cotton mill would result in more immediate aid to herself and family than any other business in which a young girl could engage.

"Can you," asked Mrs. Allen, "give up all mental and social improvement for the hope of gain?"

"I shall not have to do quite so bad as that. There are lectures and evening schools, beside other advantages which a large town always affords."

"Yes, my dear, but after you have exhausted every physical energy by twelve hours of hard labor, can you profitably sit in a school or lecture room?"

For a time there was silence in that cozy room. The low voice of Annie broke the stillness.

"Divided between the two, labor and study, the mental might not get its full desert. I have hoped for something better. Foolishly, it may be, considering my environments, yet so ardent has been my wish it has amounted to a kind of faith, a belief, in the final attainment of my object. Other things have yielded; if a higher education be required, it, too, shall be given up."

"Forgive me, Annie, if I have spoken one discouraging word. The knowledge stored in early life is the germ that must increase and multiply, even down to old age. You are young and life is a great teacher."

"Yes, but a graduate from Life's disciplinary school would not bound my desire. I would learn from those whose wisdom can

*"trace the labyrinths
Of thought, association, passion, will;
'And all the subtle, nice affinities
Of matter trace;
'And, leaving earth at will, can' soar to Heaven
And read the glorious wonders of the sky.'*

"These desires may not change or die. They must live on, but they can be hidden in my own heart too closely to interfere with other calls and obligations."

"Our Annie seems to have grown old and decided all at once. Tell us how soon you think to enter on this untried life of care and labor?"

"Very soon. I only wait the consent of my parents."

"Do you expect to gain that easily?"

"Something must be done; if they can point to nothing better why protest against a cotton mill?"

But Annie knew not the anxious love of a mother's heart, how long and hard the struggle, ere she could speak the word which would carry her child beyond the guardianship of her watchful eye, where undeserved censure or rash severity might chill forever her trusting heart.

But the consent was gained, and in two short weeks a pale woman stood by as Annie Wilmot seated herself in a lumbering vehicle which was to be her first conveyance towards Lewiston.

Lazily the wheels turned round, and the mother was standing alone. There was no gush of burning tears, but her eyes were fixed on the old yellow coach till it was hidden behind a high hill and the rumbling of its wheels died in the distance.

Then her white lips moved. "Father, preserve my child; keep her from temptation and deliver her from evil."

Lighter, stronger, grew that mother's heart as she felt that man could set no bounds to the prevailing power of her simple words.


CHAPTER VIII.

*Vain it were to watch beside
The pit where we our talents hide;
We must face the noise and strife
Of the market place of life,
That our trustiness be tried.*

*'Are you in earnest? Seize this very minute,
What you can do, or dream you can, begin it;
Boldness has genius, power and magic in it,
Only engage, and the mind grows heated;
Begin, and the work will be completed.*

—GOETHE.

AT Bradford the old yellow coach was left and Annie was hurried more rapidly to her destination by steam and rail. Now she had time to think, and never had home seemed so dear. Forgetful of its lowly estate; forgetful of its poverty, whose unsparing hand had swept from it every luxury—she remembered it only as home—where her early childhood knew no care or lasting sorrow, and its every association became deified as she was carried farther away from the cherished spot. Through the kindness of the Allens, she had a plain but sufficient wardrobe and means for present necessities. Failure was not to be thought of; but success blazoned on her banner was to be her watchword and inspiration. The last way-station had been



passed and Annie found herself in Lewiston, 'mid the jostle and confusion experienced by every traveller on arriving at a large town. These things were all new to the young girl just from her distant home and its primitive scenes; a yearning for the country quiet and familiar faces stole over her, but the thought of home reminded her of the object she had in view, and which must be attained. "Courage, my weak heart," she said, as she started alone in the pursuit of work, not a coveted task for a shrinking girl. Not far away was a tall chimney and thick brick walls, and the buzz of machinery directed her steps across the sleepy waters of the canal, through the office, and swinging open a ponderous door, Annie stood in the weaving department of a cotton mill. There was the flying shuttle, the click of the loom, the whirling pulley and shaft—all going in one prolonged clatter, deafening as Heaven's artillery.

This was her first surprise. There was a moment's hesitation and only a moment, as she felt herself the target of many bright, dazzling eyes. A few steps forward took her to a desk whose occupant had a careworn look in the expression of his fine features, and through the dark hair, brushed carelessly back, were threads of grey, showing that the freshness of youth had been supplanted by the maturity of a perfect manhood.

"Can I secure employment in this department?" was Annie's timid question.

"I regret we have no vacancies," then, noting the disappointed look on the innocent young face, he asked:

"Are you here without friends and alone?"

"Quite alone and a stranger, but if I can find work I hope to gain friends, at least, if I prove myself worthy."

"Then you expect in this strange world to get all the favors you really merit?"

"I did not say quite that. I think the deserving draw to themselves kindred spirits, and the trust and harmony of these form a friendship that endures."

Annie had found her first friend, and Mr. Sanford, the gentlemanly overseer with whom she had been talking, could not let her go with no encouraging word, so went on to ask:

"If you fail to find work, what then?"

"Indeed, sir, I have not thought. I came here supposing girls were the scarce commodity, not work."

"You may find many things different from what, in your distant home, you have thought. If you fail to secure a desirable situation call on me again. Frequent changes make openings we do not expect."

The stranger's heart can appreciate very small things and understand every look of the changing countenance and treasure with gratitude the smallest word of kindness.

"I wonder," thought Annie, as she ascended the first flight of stairs, "if all have such a pleasant way of saying no!" This question was soon settled by a tall, gaunt man to whom she next applied for work. A single monosyllable, accompanied by a gruff shake of the head, given without a look at the timid face of the questioner or turning his eye from an intricate piece of machinery, which seemed taxing both his patience and skill.

Saddened, yet in no way discouraged by this rudeness, she started again, thinking of other rooms and other mills where she might be more successful.

After visiting many to no purpose she was forced to conclude that the demand for labor was already fully supplied. "What then?" The good man's interrogatory seemed repeated.

Should she retrace her steps and trouble him, even at his own request, thus placing herself under obligation to a stranger? "Not yet," she said as she turned hopefully to a long row of buildings rented as boarding-houses for the operatives in the different mills.

"There must be plenty to do in these large families. I cannot fail to find work of some kind."

Few had spoken cheerfully and her heart grew weaker and

hope less sanguine as she walked slowly from door to door. There were families wanting help, but the weary mistress desired a more athletic servant, on whose strength she might lay a portion of her own heavy burden.

"Only this once," thought Annie as she entered a neat yard and placed her hand on the bell knob. Soon little feet came pattering along the hall.

A child with sunny look drew back the door; dark, dreamy eyes looked into her face; then her name was spoken in the clear, sweet tones of animated childhood. Little arms were about her neck and many kisses on her pale cheek.

"Mamma!" shouted the child, leaving Annie standing in the hall, "come and see! I am glad she has come," and the little, shrill voice grew strong in unbounded delight.

The mother placed her finger on the lips of her noisy little girl, unable to comprehend the cause of her excessive joy.

"Twice welcome," said the good woman a moment later, as she clasped the hand of the tired Annie, who she remembered to have met a few months before at the home of the Wilmots.

"Mrs. Barlow!" exclaimed Annie, too much astonished to say more, as she recognized the woman, who, with the little ones, had shared the hospitality offered by her parents at a time when they could feed the wayfarer only by giving them meat that might ere many suns be needed on their own scantily supplied board. She was very poor then and her children looked haggard and forsaken. A change had passed over them. The mother was clad in comfort and her eye lighted with joy as she looked into the innocent face of her youngest darling or heard the boisterous mirth of Annette, who was not so remarkable for her quiet habits as for the unrest of her glib little tongue.

The first warm greeting over, Annie was shown to a neatly furnished parlor, where, after a few minutes' rest, she explained the reason of being in Lewiston, regretting her ill success and inability to obtain employment.

"You were getting quite disheartened by what you thought bad luck," replied Mrs. Barlow. "Yet, see, it was only to bring you to me, where you are to remain till something better offers."

"I will stay with you, Mrs. Barlow, and be thankful for the timely aid. But I must not be burdensome. I think I can be useful in your family. Now, if you please, tell me by what freak of chance you have become mistress of this good and pleasant home."

"Chance, my dear, seldom stays in its headlong flight to look after those who have positively nothing. A brother's kind heart devised for me all this happiness, his purse supplied the money, and his influence filled my house with a class of boarders of whom any mistress might be proud."

"I did not know you had a brother."

"Neither did I know it when I left you so lonely, thinking there were none to pity, advise or help me. I only knew that years before I had an idolized brother—Andrew Sanford—that he left for the far West a few days before I was to sail with my husband for San Francisco, where I was to receive his first letter. Thence we were to go by mule express to Nevada, being attracted thither by the quartz mills in that region, and the great pecuniary advantages they offered the laborer. At Castle City we were to find our second mail. Beyond this we had left our plans to be governed by transpiring events.

"How vain are earthly expectations. Before the first boat a severe attack of typhoid fever brought me to the very verge of the grave. That delayed us many weeks and finally caused the entire change of our plans. We were not forgetful of my brother, but trusted to hearing of him through other relatives or friends. Months came and went, yet still no tidings. Then years of anxious doubt rolled by, and each supposed the other dead, till the newspaper record of my husband's decease reached the absent one, who, during the last of those weary years, had been an overseer in one of the mills you have just left. Arranging his busi-

ness for a short absence, hoping, yet fearing, he started in search of his long-lost sister. Arriving at my former residence he learned I had left that morning for Lewiston without sufficient means to defray the usual expenses of the journey. It was not strange that his anxious eye scanned every woman it met, watching at every station for persons answering our description. At Bradford I was aware of his presence, for he was there, and before young Allen had left the train, by his close scrutiny had drawn towards me much attention. It was not marvelous that others should wonder at a scene surpassing many stage dramas," and Mrs. Barlow smiled as she went on. "Andrew, well dressed and gentlemanly in look and manner; I a beggar with a frightened child whose screams competed with the whistle of the engine. I, for one, heard no other sound and thought of nothing else. The first surprise over, he saw more of my youthful looks struggling for identity from beneath many badges of sorrow. He was sure—sure the 'pale boatman' had not called his sister. Sure the Alice of our home, instead of being a wanderer, poor and uncared for in the midst of an unknown people, was again returned to his yearning heart. The confidence of my trusting Annette was gained with a single orange; then, with her natural volubility, she gave to his keeping all our history he could wish to know. We were far on the way to this place and I wondered the stranger man did not tire of my chatterbox. I heard him ask:

"Does mamma never tell you of Uncle Andrew?"

"Oh, yes," and the little bright face grew suddenly sad, "but he died a long way from here. He was very good and would love me and do kind things for us all if he had lived till now. But mamma says it is all right."

"There was a thrilling sweetness in that voice, and its tender power flashed along every nerve ere there had been time for me to recognize my brother—lost, but returned to me in this hour of my necessities. As I silently placed my hand in his there was no

word to express the soul's thanksgiving. A moment before, but for my children, I should have desired death, for life seemed a cheerless waste. I only hoped for rest, when my burdened heart should cease its weary throb. My brother's smile had dissipated the gloom around my path, the world was again enticing and life dear as in the halcyon days of the past. Yes, I would live, not only for others, but for myself. The rest you know; you can look around and see it all."

"Where is that brother now?" asked the listener.

"At his old post, having charge of the weaving in the large mill."

Annie was about to reply that she remembered his pleasant face, but was prevented by other words from Mrs. Barlow:

"Yes, my dear, he has many girls and may not think the services of others necessary just now, yet he will not let one walk our streets in search of employment who once fed his starving sister."

"We gave the stranger of our poverty," thought Annie; "it has proved bread cast on the water, has given me a shelter and, it may be, will bring me work."

Turning to Mrs. Barlow, she said:

"So large a house will accommodate many persons—you have not told me how many."

"About fifty."

"Fifty! How can you look so quiet and happy surrounded by such an army of girls?"

"A battalion would offer no cause for being disturbed. You will feel differently after being fairly initiated. New scenes are always wonderful. Most of our girls are pleasant, and since their residence here is temporary, are disposed to make the best of inconveniences, and little things so trying to the patience, yet quite unavoidable by those who seek to do the bidding of others. You cannot expect that rosy youth crowns with her freshest laurels all in so large a family, coming together without choice or selection, from different places. The indigent widow and

lonely spinster must have a living somewhere. They are scattered through the mills, their habits of application bringing them into general favor. Both classes have their delegates with me, yet the larger portion of my household are girls of nearly your own age, too fond of frolic to spend their little leisure in ill-natured complaint about little vexations. The confusion occasioned by so many together may trouble you at first, but you will accustom yourself to that, and, with the others, be content with present blessings, in anticipation of the monthly payment of wages—brightest day in the mill girl's calendar."

The brother of Mrs. Barlow must have been recognized as Andrew Sanford, the man to whom Annie first applied for work. Rightly had his sister judged his kind heart, which so reluctantly allowed her to go away without a fair prospect of success. When he heard from Mrs. Barlow what she knew of the young girl and her home, all former objections were waived and Annie Wilmot became what she had long desired—a factory girl.

She thought the cost had been well counted, that her heart was making a willing offering. But she could not penetrate the dark vista shrouding the future; could not see the present was but the giving up of a toy compared with the lifelong sacrifice, the daily yielding of fondest hopes and wishes.

"Wisdom hides the book of fate."

Learning a new work is never a pleasant experiment, and Annie strove hard to repel a feeling of homesickness as she bent diligently over her task.

On the evening of the third day, as she passed from the dining-room to the long hall of the house, she noticed a group of girls listening to some flashy remarks from Kate Sommers, one of their number, whose ready wit seemed bent on mischief, without a thought of the pain it might bring to others. Who ever saw a Kate whose love of fun did not amount to a passion? Lightly in

her dimpled hand she held a coarse straw hat, which the nimble fingers of the new boarder had braided in the quiet of her distant home.

"Here, girls," she said, "who will not change their last Paris for this bit of antiquity, manufactured from straw that fell from the crib of the meek-eyed cow as she was stalled in the historic old ark, or, maybe, exhumed from the ruins of poor old Pompeii, stolen from the museum at Naples or possibly shipped with those latter day Puritans in the Mayflower, while this velvet band may be a strip of the original breeches made sacred by having once graced the limbs of a Winthrop. Who'll bid, who'll bid? The chance of a lifetime. Five—do I hear five? shall it not be six? Shamefully low for this rare relic—but it is—going, going, go——"

At this period she noticed Annie, who had approached her unperceived. Her troubled look and unexpected presence for once paralyzed the auctioneer and she failed to send even one saucy glance after the retreating Annie, who had quietly taken the ridiculed hat and ascended the stairs leading to her room.

A tear dropped on the velvet band, sacred not as Puritanic relic, but as the gift of her lost sister. Lost—for between them hung the dark, impervious veil.

"Oh, Kate, how could you?" spoke one of the group who had been Annie's roommate since her coming to the home of Mrs. Barlow. "Life has so many hard things for the lonely girl that cannot be helped. One kind word would have been so much better. You know the hat is well enough; better than mine."

Kate, who had reached the stairs, turned towards the speaker with returning glimpses of the old twinkle in her eye.

"Edith Gregg," she said, "you are a jewel. Consistency and Forethought the twin stars in your crown. Had I known Miss Wilmot was near I should not have asked for the highest bidder on her hat. But" (and a saucy look danced in Kate's eye as she

went on), "sprouting in the country wilds, unique as it looked to me, how could I have helped it?"

Then, hurrying up the stairs, she stood before the door of Annie's room. She rapped lightly, but, getting no answer, turned the knob and walked in unbidden. There was the offending hat, there the weeping girl, with her head resting on a small table by which she was sitting. Going to her side she said:

"I have done a foolish thing, and came to tell you the fault was not in the hat but in my unrestrained and reckless love of fun. Confessing cannot mend the wrong; it is only the first step in a right direction."

Kate looked to see the bowed head lifted, but it remained very still and she heard no answer, save a stifled sob.

"Have I offended you so deeply that I may not hope for pardon on any terms, Miss Wilmot? I will not ask forgiveness that you cannot grant without proof of my sincerity. Only please do not let the foolish incidents of to-night give you further pain, till I so far forget myself as to repeat the injury or in some way become guilty of a like unkindness towards yourself."

Again Kate waited for the words of reconciliation. Another silence ensued, harder to be borne than words of angry hate. Annie was grieved. She did not understand the strange girl before her, nor did she attach much importance to her off-hand, business-like manner and words. How could she forgive her? But the good prevailed, and when she looked up there were few traces of emotion in her quiet expression and amiable words.

"I will not," she said, "longer remember this as an unkindness. It was childish in me to do so at first, but I happened to be weak and sensitive."

"Enough, Miss Wilmot, enough. We understand each other now. I am sure we shall learn to be friends. Good-night. Let a kiss be the pledge of my sincerity."

Once more in the hall Kate met the friend who so lately ventured a reproof for her heedless words.

"Barely in season," she said, "to escape being present at the confession, an act to which your long face and censorious words have driven me. Your young lady did not, at first, seem disposed to grant my prayer. But my contrite words and fair promises thawed her from her throne of icy silence, and she not only pardoned the little joke, but bade me good-night with what she intended as a sweet smile."

"I am glad to see your name redeemed by this outward act of justice. But, after all, Kate, I instinctively hold my old straw a little closer in your presence."

"Never fear, since your hat has not come down the ages—'tis the bit of antiquity that captivates me."

With a mischievous nod Kate finished speaking and the girls separated, Edith going to her quiet room, to spend a pleasant hour with her books and newly made friend, while the indefinable Kate, sobered scarcely for the passing hour, in the seclusion of a grim old attic clad herself in gipsy attire, then, with her long hair hanging loosely over her shoulders and her eyes trained to a wild, preternatural fierceness, canvassed the circle of her acquaintances as old Bet, the fortune-teller, replenished her purse with the shillings of credulity and regained the covert of her own room without notice or suspicion.

Never were girls more unlike. Kate, laughing her young life away, believing the noontide of her frolic would never wane, turning even her own trials into joke and ridicule.

On the other hand, the furnace of affliction had taught Edith that life at best is but an April day, with its moments of sunshine and showers of tears. Once and again had the dark angel settled over her home, till only two of a numerous family remained. While the young mourner drew more closely her sable weeds as she bent over the grave of her baby sister she felt for her there was no amaranth, only the cypress, the last farewell, the funeral and the grave. Insatiate disease looked grudgingly on the brother it had spared. From its premonitory touch he fled to

milder climes, hoping in the softer air of Cuba to prolong a frail existence. From that island he sailed as commissioned agent to more foreign ports, at last finding his way to Italy—that land of sunny brightness and perfected art.

The day of Edith's introduction to our story had brought her a sealed package from this distant brother.

Annie was still studying the eccentricities of the strange and even wonderful Kate as Edith entered, her face radiant with pleasure.

Edgar, her last remaining relative, who, she had feared, was already a mark for the unerring archer, had written her from Rome.

With health improved, he had formed there business relations which would lead to his making that city his permanent home. In every line a sister traced a quiet happiness to which he had been a stranger for weary years in the past.

Not that Rome, with her ancient glory and boasted splendor, could lift her proud head above the cloud-topped hills of his native land. His love of home and country were not alienated from the spangled banner, but more gentle breezes had borne him fresh vitality, and he clung to those shores which promised him more to hope and expect.

"Nor is this all," added Edith. "He would have me join him there, a wish his unsettled future has held in check till the present time."

"Shall you go?" asked Annie, forgetting the past in prospect of new trials.

"Probably not. There are objections in the way not so easily removed."

"Then we may guess there is a stronger attachment; nothing else could keep you from your brother."

"Annie, I have loved Edgar with a fond, enduring affection; every new bereavement drawing us more closely together; nor does the separating distance weaken those strong ties. Yet, strange

as these things appear, one who was unknown until within a few short months claims a still higher, holier love. When I saw our home made desolate, as one by one was called from its fireside, I thought no new affection should ever bind me to earth. But the young heart is made for love. How can I shut within myself these sweet yearnings, more than the vine may twine around its own soft tendrils, while the sturdy oak is its inviting neighbor?"

"Then we are to lose you, sure, for the benefit of some one?"

"Not at present—not till you have had time to find new friends, when my absence need no longer seem a loss."

"New friends! Shall I accept the one who called at my room to-night as a revised model of what is to come?"

Edith smiled as she answered:

"You will not find a manufacturing population entirely select, or differing materially from the mixed multitudes occupying other large towns and cities. The good and bad, learned and ignorant, every disposition and temperament are here. But, never fear, Annie, there is but one Kate Sommers—it is well there is not. With help, she would turn the world upside down, then laugh that the Babel of her invention could so far eclipse the confusion which overtook the children of men in the plains of Shina."

"Mrs. Barlow told me she had very good girls."

"Kate is not morally bad, and you will find her intelligent and kind-hearted. But she lacks fixed principles, which should restrain her thoughtless, restless desire for what she calls fun and a good time generally. Her lack of caution is constantly leading her into unpleasant dilemmas, from which no other girl would think of getting out. Her ready wits seem to enjoy the disposal of hard things, and she extricates herself from interwoven tangles with an indifferent ease quite provoking. But we have learned not to wince at any gust blowing from Kate's amalgamating brain, and you will, ere long, find it best to become a disciple to the same wise policy."

"I would not," replied Annie, "like to give my assent to wrong, even by silence."

"Probably not. Yet I think there are times when an unbroken quiet is the two-edged sword and silence proves the better part of valor, even when we know one is trying to support and promulgate an error. To oppose often leads to anger and bitter discriminations.

"That class should be allowed to exhaust their vocabulary, and in the stillness that follows feel a kind of contempt for their own folly, while you will only remember the first disagreeable proposition, not followed by any questionable word of your own. Of course, it will call for good sense and judgment to decide when and when not to speak. I do not believe in a timid cowardice that dare not stand shoulder to shoulder with a friend whom you believe to be assailed by slander and injustice. Nor would I forsake a righteous principle though I should brave the power of thrones; but, in my opinion, 'tis the constant everyday life, not the deluge of words, that moves the world in the right direction.

"But we have made a long evening for these wearied before by the tiresome duties of the day."

Here the new friends retired for a night of peaceful repose, disturbed only by the heavy stroke of the clock, proclaiming the passing hours of time.

CHAPTER IX.

*'Twas the merry eve of Christmas, all the city blazed with light,
And the gush of happy voices thrilled like music through
the night.*

*Merrily the little children danced beneath the Christmas tree,
Heavy with its glittering branches, full of gifts as they could be.*

THE pale green of spring, the darker hues of summer, and the gorgeous splendor of autumn, had each in turn lent beauty and variety to earth. All had passed away, and through the tall forest trees, now shorn of their foliage, the wintry winds howled, while Santa Claus waited in a shower of feathery flakes for the midnight hour, noted alike for the journey of his reindeer team and the fairy phantoms of the ether blue.

The impressions of early life are strong and lasting, and later, when the child is perfected in growth and years, and understands the myth of this December day, he chooses to recall it as an oasis, the reality of which he would not banish from his calendar. Dark indeed is the home of the little one where this morn of glad tidings is not foreshadowed by some herald of love, some mark of affection.

Annie had been eight months in Lewiston, with scarce a holiday. It was the night before Christmas, and Mrs. Barlow's numerous family had many of them left to spend the merry hours of Christmas with relatives and friends 'neath the roof-tree of their not far distant homes. Annie sat thoughtfully in her own room, trying

very hard to read and understand the open page that lay before her. This was the first Christmas she had ever spent away from the humble home of her youth. There she had never looked for an expensive gift, but the mother-love had never failed to procure some little token that should make the day ever memorable to her children. It was a sweet recollection, and Annie hugged it to her hungry heart. Then she thought of the poor around her. She had never been selfish—and to them on this glad day she would give much—yet her own necessities compelled her to give but very little. She had cast in her mite with her friend, and her deft fingers had fashioned many, both pretty and useful, articles to gladden the less fortunate ones, who might otherwise be neglected or forgotten. But this was to be done in a quiet way—for neither the one nor the other thought well of giving to some little waif a small and comparatively worthless thing in the immediate presence of more fortunate ones, who might receive beautiful and tempting gifts. The very poor may have sensitive natures. They can see and, alas, feel keenly the dividing line that in school, church and state marks the bounds of wealth and poverty. They would have none of this, and after arranging their different articles and perfecting their plans for the morrow, they sought the sleep of the just and innocent, only to be awakened at an early hour by the joyful shouts of the Barlow children, who were jubilant over the good Santa who had filled their stockings to overflowing, while the mother shed tears of gratitude as she saw the many good things committed to her keeping.

After the breakfast hour their little merchandise was arranged, and the young girls started on their missions of love. They found the old and infirm who sat uncared for and alone, yet with a halo of hope around them in the sure promise of a youthful immortality. They entered rooms so cheerless and damp that their winter wraps were scarce sufficient to keep them from shivering with cold. They saw the gentle wife, who

watched the life spark that faded each day in the eye of her dying husband. They found the forlorn ones—children, bare-footed, thinly clad, unwashed faces, unkept hair, and eyes so painfully pathetic and wistful. Their last call was to a very humble home, where they had seen a frail child, young in years, but with a face aged and pinched by poverty, with only summer clothing to guard against the wintry frost. Another messenger had crossed the threshold before them, and with him the child had left the dark and cold room of its earthly dwelling for the house of many mansions. From here the girls went homeward, and in their own room thought long and silently of the scenes they had left. Annie broke the stillness by asking:

“When was the first Christmas?”

“A mooted question,” replied her friend, “too far away for us to answer. They tell us some time in the second century. Before that, I think, history tells us that Constantine, for cruelty’s own sake, closed the doors on many worshippers one Christmas night, then set fire to the building, and they all perished. I think its first observance was in Roman Catholic and Greek churches. On this account some of our Puritan fathers objected to its observance.”

“As it was to celebrate the day of Christ’s nativity, why choose the twenty-fifth of December rather than the tenth of May—His real birthday, I think?”

“Here is perhaps another doubtful question, on which there was a difference of opinion by those many years nearer His birth than——”

Here the conversation was interrupted by a slight tap on the door, and a dainty box was handed in for Miss Wilmot. As she quickly removed the cover, a card fell on the table, on which was inscribed the name of W. L. Ashley. A bright flush suffused the cheek of Annie as she gazed on a small

bouquet of beautiful flowers. This was a revelation to Edith, which blanched her face to something akin to deathly pallor.

"Are they not beautiful?" exclaimed the happy girl, holding up the flowers for inspection, "lovely, and so fragrant."

Rallying a little from her first shock of astonishment, Edith replied, "Very fair and lovely—but the stream has risen higher than the fountain."

"Impossible—what do you mean?"

"Well, I will speak a little plainer. The flowers are far more lovely than the one who gave them. You know something of the language of flowers. Here is a sprig of cedar, which signifies, 'I live for thee.' False word as was ever uttered by man. He never did and never will live for any one but Ashley. White rose—'forever thine.' Think of it, and every other flower expressive of love. The ruling word of heaven. A divinity in itself, of which he never knew the first letter."

Here the excited girl stopped, and Annie replaced her flowers in the little box, hallowed them with a tear, and carried them from sight. None would fear to trust Annie with one whose crooked ways and ungentlemanly manners had drawn to himself her critical gaze and merited displeasure; but would her better judgment, and strong love of right rise equal to the occasion where the heart was concerned, or would she—not blindly, but willfully—allow her great love to overtop every other principle and lead her to a lifelong wretchedness? We shall see. The flowers thus summarily dismissed left a brooding silence in their wake, the first of its kind since they learned to know each other; Edith, shocked that her quiet friend should fall into the toils of the one man whom she could neither love nor respect, (when and how had been planted this seed of noxious growth?) while Annie felt herself aggrieved by a supposed injustice towards the man who had kindled in her young heart the first vital spark of the heavenly flame.

But the dinner—so skilfully prepared and neatly laid—left

no misty shade to obscure the remaining happiness of that winter day.

The curtains of evening were softly drawing around and the last rays of the sun left the western sky glorious in the blended shades of red, blue and gold, imparting a soft, soothing light, fading gradually with the approach of darkness.

"Now for the Christmas tree," exclaimed the joyous Edith, as she left Mr. Fletcher (her affianced) and sought the presence of Annie. The short walk was inspiring, and they were soon in the church vestry, where boughs of green were laden with gifts for the waiting multitude.

Here they listened to a few words of welcome, then a chorus of infant voices, whose lisping song was of Bethlehem, whose Day-star should illumine the isles of the sea and carry peace and good will to the nations of the earth sitting in the shadow of darkness. Then came the bearded and fur-clad Santa Claus, who, from his ample pockets threw to the shouting little ones the much-prized candy and small toys, while the distribution of larger gifts was to close the merry Christmas.

From some unexpected source beautiful skates found a way to the hands of our young friends, which, by Edith, were welcomed with a glad smile, telling of happy anticipations in the moonlit nights of the coming winter, while Annie's face expressed astonishment if not disgust.

"Skates!" she said, "skates! What are we to do with skates?"

"Use them, of course," replied the laughing Edith.

"Use them?" repeated Annie, and the rich crimson flooded her face.

The surprised girl had yet to learn that she had alighted where skating was the mania among all classes, confined to neither age nor sex. To her skating was connected with the half-grown boy, whose awkward limbs, untaught by grace or symmetry, could measure fabulous lengths on the newly frozen ice.

She had heard of skating girls in the frozen north of the old country contending for championship by the side of their male companions, but not here, under the watchful eye of staid Puritanism.

"You seem displeased, even vexed," remarked Edith, "while I am delighted in this foretaste of coming pleasure. But, pardon me, I quite forgot you had no older brother to lead you in some of the rougher sports of outdoor life. Edgar was a fine skater and he taught me to follow at no out of sight distance. Have courage, a little practice will revolutionize your ideas of skates."

Mr. Allen, the grey-haired minister, who had, unobserved, heard this little colloquy, came to the front, and, laying his hand gently on Annie's arm, said, smilingly:

"My young friend is not so passive as to object to this lively exercise. 'Tis simply a prejudice and long-continued unfavorable opinion (which should be withdrawn) that has in many places robbed skating of its popularity with young girls. Skates are all right if you keep on them; but beware of a lurch to the right or left, or a plunge forward, if you value your nose. These movements might give you a bump unknown to phrenology."

Edith considered her case well championed, while Annie thought: "Lead us in the straight and narrow way on Sunday and lessons in skating Monday. What would Mr. Merten think of such a theology? and yet I think I like him. He would let the mind relax at times from working out the hard problems of life; rest and recuperate in innocent pleasure and amusement. Yes, I know that I like him."

This was Miss Wilmot's first inference of the minister.

Edith was always happy to meet her pastor. In seasons of sorrow he had been her comforter. In frequent bereavements he had helped her to feel that existence here was but the commencement of life eternal. That she should again meet the

"conscious spirit"—spark of Immensity in the boundless limits of a heavenly sphere.

Mr. Allen had not always been a minister in a large town, having accepted a call to Lewiston when its inhabitants were too few and its little church too poor to pay him more than a meagre salary. For years he struggled with untold difficulties, hoping always and uncomplaining, till large manufacturing interests became centred in the town and the few wooden houses multiplied to a large and flourishing village, while his feeble church grew strong in numbers and wealth. With a larger society his duties and work increased, with unbounded effort and a fund of patience he strove to harmonize every discordant note, by bringing his people more closely together, encouraging a greater unity of thought and feeling, not only religiously but socially, thus binding more tightly the ties of friendship and interest in each other. He did not place before them the knotty questions common people could not solve, nor did his discourses from the desk belittle the higher thought and antagonize the finer feelings of those of his audience who had been favored with a broader and more expanded education.

By his own simple way of earnest sincerity he would keep in touch with and educate his whole people to love and unity, while his everyday life was a sermon more potent than the spoken word.

With a feeling that she had spent as nearly a happy day as she could expect, ended Annie's first Christmas in Lewiston.

CHAPTER X.

*Love never fails to master what he finds,
But works a different way in different minds,
The fool enlightens, and the wise he blinds.*

—DRYDEN.

THE soft, clear light of the moon, at times dimmed by fleecy clouds, the bracing air of a winter's night, with the knowledge that the ice was sufficiently strong for safety, proved a temptation too strong to be resisted by a skating community.

"To the river—to the river!" were the words sounding along the line, nor were our friends numbered with those in the background.

"Are you eager for the first exercise?" asked Mr. Fletcher of Annie, as they neared the joyous gathering of old and young.

"I wish I was an expert. But I fear my skates more than goblins at midnight."

"Worse than the masonic goat? But he is easily tamed, and your skates will prove your obedient servants."

Here, much to the surprise of Edith, she saw the erect figure of Mr. Ashley coming from she knew not where, to walk by the side of Annie till they reached the shore, then, adjusting her skates, started with her for the smooth, clear ice.

Those who have had the first test on skates can understand how perfectly helpless the condition of the novice.

Though Edith knew that Annie's safety depended on the sup-

port and attention of Ashley, she turned away in contempt genuine and complete.

"What need," she at length asked, "has the world of such men? Not a social force at all, no inspiration for good, or will to do good for himself or others. A nonentity, unless his evil genius prompts him to some act both disagreeable and harmful. Where did Annie learn to think of him or how endure him, I do not see."

"Only a flirtation," replied Mr. Fletcher.

"Annie is no flirt."

"Well, you may console yourself by knowing

*"Whom first we love we seldom wed—
But I know yet more truly that
Earthly fame—e'en hope of heaven
Will not tempt her to forget.'"*

"Ah, indeed! If the case is as desperate as you picture it, words will be vain. The fewer the better. Let her be happy while she may. If she marries Ashley there are sad days enough for her when hope will promise no brighter morrow."

Mr. Ashley may have been recognized as the second man whom Annie asked for work the day of her arrival in Lewiston. He had strong ideas of his own in regard to woman's appropriate sphere and duties. He scorned her desire for progress, and yet more did he rebel against a will he could neither subdue nor tame. He expected perfect submission and regard for himself and his every word. Mr. Sanford would often smile at his folly and remind him that Yankee girls, cradled in the principles of equal rights and educated in New England schools, would not cringe before man or money, that lordly cant will yield only crops of ridicule and contempt.

"If you would have respect, learn first to offer it to others. There will be no trouble. I have tried it these many years."

Mr. Ashley placed no value on such ideas and advice. He had not been educated in the free schools of New England. He had no reminiscence of the old brown schoolhouse set apart from every green bush that might shade it from a summer's sun or form some obstacle to the drifting snows, which, in their season, piled to its summit. No vision of the coasting party, the apple-bee or husking. Mr. Ashley was not a Yankee. A native of western New York in the early days of its history, and in a section where children were more numerous than books or schools, consequently he had few public advantages for improvement. The deficiency might have been remedied in part by a wise course of practical training at home; but, unfortunately, very little attention was given to the habits or moral culture of this only child of parents, who, after a few short years, were swept away in the same week by an epidemic that proved disastrously fatal in that region of the country. Thus the young Ashley was left alone at an age when boys most need the gentle influence of a mother's love and the restraining counsel of a judicious father. His inherited possessions, consisting mostly of real estate, were exchanged, and invested, subject to his orders, after a series of years. The business thus settled he went with a migrating relative to the interior of Mexico. There, amid natural and civil convulsions, the confusion of tongues and the distinction of races, he learned his first lesson in tyranny—that strength could trample on weakness and acknowledge no accountability to the Giver of power and possessions. Induced by hope of greater gains, his relative made a retrograde move, accompanied by Ashley and pitching tent for a season on the southern borders of Louisiana.

A separate employment becoming necessary, Ashley sought and obtained, near Baton Rouge, a situation as overseer on a plantation of negroes, from which place he was sent occasionally to New Orleans, to occupy a like place in the cotton yards of that city.

The sunny South proved at length too enervating for a consti-

tution bound by natural ties to cooler latitudes and more bracing winds. The past had not effaced all memories of the rural spot where he spent the first years of his life. He longed for them once more with a kind of yearning hope that their tranquillizing quiet would restore what he had lost and bring back the old feeling of content to his troubled breast. Ere many suns steam and rail had taken him to the place of his nativity.

The first look of surprise was followed by a frown of displeasure, as he walked the streets and stood before a fine hotel which had risen on the ground once occupied by his father's cottage and less pretending out-buildings. Change had been there and laid its transforming hand on every familiar object.

"The Yankee," muttered Ashley, "the abominable Yankee. Who cannot see his characteristic advances, his upturnings, and trace his hurried, crazing strides at every step?" Angry and disgusted, he turned to meet an out-going train without gratifying the curious villagers by any revelation of his name or business.

"Peace," began Mr. Ashley, when he was again comfortably seated in a car pointed due north—"cease, my soul, from the unrest that chafes and goads thee. Already are bounds set to these low, plebeian encroachments, barriers the cowardly mudsill dare not overleap, not they. Dixon's line is imaginary. Like other phantoms it must soon disappear. What then? Only a step, and, protected by law, I can chain my nigger to the gate-post of Wendell Phillips, or lash him on the threshold of the fanatic Garrison." Relieving himself by these and similar thoughts, he settled down for a little jostled sleep.

Mr. Ashley had been a slave-driver, but he had no thought of breathing this in the north land whither he was going. He was flying from rumor, flying from her scandalized voice; but he committed a grave mistake in supposing the fleet reporter could be left in the background. On the swiftest wings of Aurora its whispers will pursue wherever man will venture, from the earth's

centre to the glistening icebergs of the frigid zone. Two years later the skeptical Ashley believed this, and his knees smote together as Belshazzar's, when a sweet child, nestling in a nook of the granite hills, shrank from his caress and, disengaging herself from his clinging arm, said, angrily:

"I do not love you, because you whipped little black girls once, a big way off. Everybody knows it is so, and mamma fears you are not good; so let me alone, you bad man."

Having shocked her auditor by such unexpected disclosures, the little plain-speaker pouted vehemently her rosy lips and sought refuge in the arms of her elder sister. That sister was the cousin of Edith Gregg and affianced bride of Mr. Ashley.

When suspicion first centred on her lover, she repelled its approach with all the earnestness of injured truth. As the case became graver and the net of evidence more tangled and complicated, she was silent, yet, with woman's blind persistency, she trusted only him, till, away from kindred, in a strange city, she became his wife, only to drink to the dregs the cup of disappointment—then welcome death—

*"Whose freezing kiss
Emancipates! the rest is bliss!"*

The evening was gone, and Annie turned homeward, with a growing belief that skates might bring in their train some very enjoyable hours.

Wearied with the toil of a long day, and many having joined in the pleasures of the evening, Mrs. Barlow's numerous family were soon resting sweetly in the arms of Morpheus. On ticked the clock, little heeding life's joys and sorrows, its smiles and tears. The noon of night had come, and one, sleeping less soundly than the others, half roused to the belief there was smoke. In a moment she was awake to all the possibilities of a house on fire. In the hall there was smoke and a strong odor of burning

cotton. The entire household was aroused, and, dressing in hot haste, hurried below. Rigid search revealed no cause for the scare, while both the odor and smoke became less positive.

Annie, who had a morbid dread of fire, was a silent statue near the street door. Here Edith approached her, and putting her arm around the trembling girl, asked:

"Do you think Kate Sommers seems very much alarmed?"

Just a look and Annie replied:

"Her watch and purse in one hand and not more than half-dressed."

"Yes; but the twinkle in her eye tells more of frolic than fear. So let us leave this midnight racket and try for another nap before the morning bell."

"You cannot think," said Annie, as they entered their own room, "this has been gotten up by Kate? How could she?"

"How? An easy matter to smoke us out by half-smouldered cotton."

"Why does Mrs. Barlow tolerate such things?"

"Simply because she has no positive proof. Kate never leaves a bar down. In her wake no footstep is ever found. The wonder is she did not ring in an alarm."

The season wore away till the warm suns looked with determined gaze on the melting ice.

Annie's face lengthened with the days till a morn of unusual mildness shattered her last hope of skating.

"The river cannot be safe after this," she said sadly. "I am lonely at the thought of it. Is it not too bad?"

"Substitute Mr. Ashley," answered Edith, in unwonted petulance, "the dimensions might be objectionable, but faultless in the more important item of being sufficiently frozen at all times and seasons."

Annie looked in the face of her friend. There was no merry twinkle of the eye, no lurking smile about the mouth. She saw an earnest meaning there, a bitter expression she had never

noticed before, but which she remembered in the sure light of after years.

"I respect your judgment," she said after a short pause, "and would not insist on your doubting the evidence of your own senses. Much that you believe respecting Mr. Ashley is hearsay—reports starting from ant-hills and growing to mountains, through the mouths of many messengers. Your hard opinion of him may be based on undue prejudice, whose blinding influence will reveal and magnify the poor man's faults, hiding his virtues—which, for aught that I can see, are as active and numerous as those of his less criticised acquaintance."

"I agree with you, Annie, in thinking that opinions based on prejudice should be accepted with caution. Like other things, prejudice has two sides—for and against—the one leading as far astray from right conclusions as the other. We will, if you please, let the past of Mr. Ashley remain in silence. I am angry with him more for present wrong than those acts of injustice carried back and smoothed a little by time. You have noticed Celia Burnap—the pale young girl sitting near me at table?"

"Yes, I remember; she has been here but a short time. Yet her sad, quiet face and engaging manner could not fail to win both a look and a thought."

"She is an orphan, without a brother, sister or near relative. After the death of her parents she spent a few years with the farmers in her neighborhood till, tired of dependence, she came to Lewiston. On the day of her arrival Mr. Ashley, in a fit of ill-nature, discharged some half-dozen of his girls, whose places must be supplied by others. Celia had no trouble in getting work with him. The trouble came after, in her inability to please. Yesterday, for some slight violation of his Draco code, he dismissed Celia, refusing, at the same time, his permission for her to work elsewhere in the place."

"If Mr. Ashley does not want the girl, what right has he to interfere with her efforts for employment outside his room?"

"Not a constitutional right. But the managers of corporations sometimes agree that the operative shall not leave the employ of one overseer for another without the consent of the first party. There may be times when it is well enough, yet in many cases I do not understand its justice."

"Mr. Ashley may be hasty. I think he meant well, and would if the matter were explained, amend his thoughtless conduct so far as it is likely to prove an injury to Celia."

"He will retrace no step unless compelled. On the contrary, the petty tyrant will wield what power he has to its utmost limit, then grumble that he can do no more. I have heard you wish you were a man. Though I never cared for the honor, I should like strength enough in this case to chastise Mr. Ashley for his oppressive conduct towards the weak."

"Your wishes concerning Celia may be realized without a resort to corporal measures. I will see Mr. Ashley in the morning. No doubt he will give her work himself, or allow her to go wherever she may choose."

"God speed you in the goodly work. Were it another man I should guarantee your success. Mr. Ashley will have no disposition to relent. He may desire your favor, yet would sooner demand it as his right—the homage due his superiority—than seek to gain it by complying with your known wishes."

Annie was not well pleased with the positive dislike Edith always evinced towards Mr. Ashley. Thinking to refute it all by proving her once mistaken, she went early the next forenoon to Mr. Ashley's place of business.

Confident of success, she stated the case of Miss Burnap, and asked that she might have her old situation.

He heard her through without interruption; then, with a stern, unyielding look, said:

"If she had been in this homeless condition, she should have kept a good position when she had it."

"Was Celia guilty of disorderly conduct or improprieties?" asked Annie.

"Yes; she was late to her work, which she knew was a direct violation of rules."

"There might have been a sufficient reason."

"I am not expected to look into these matters. 'Tis enough that those in my employ are expected to be prompt."

A flush came to the cheek of the questioner as she remembered instances in her own experience where a five or ten minutes' short-coming had passed unnoticed.

But she choked down her vexation and went on: "Was this her first offence?"

"No matter—first, or second, the act is the same and the influence on the observing help the same."

"She has neither money or home. Do you wish her to beg?"

"A turn at that might do her good, by teaching her the worth of a good, paying place when she has it."

"As you persist in caring nothing for her yourself, will you allow Mr. Sanford to offer her employment?"

"No! The girl will work for me when I get ready. Of one thing you may be sure: she will not, on her return, find the same situation she left. Such girls require discipline."

"You would not offer her less profitable work?" interrupted Annie. If she was not angry, her thoughts seemed travelling fast in that direction.

"She will take the position I may please to give her. A girl should know her place; if she does not, she should be taught——"

"Taught!" said Annie, "to quietly accept the insulting terms you offer. The world reaches far beyond this town, and Celia Burnap will never work for you another day."

"Indeed! Pray what do you think to do? The average girl can do little more than take care of number one."

"I admit a girl can do but little, the reason why that little should be done in the right time and place.

"You refuse to do a deed of kindness, an act of common civility and justice, thus throwing a young orphan on charity? But know one thing, Mr. Ashley, Celia Burnap shall never face a cold world without one friend."

At these words Mr. Ashley seem slightly astonished. He did not expect a woman—especially a girl in her teens—to challenge any word or act of his.

His voice was a trifle softer as he said:

"You are behaving foolishly, Miss Wilmot. We might expect wiser things from you. But, as small things are often the beginning of great events, you may revolutionize the world."

Only a scornful look answered these last words, and she turned to the door, forgetting everything but a wish to aid this wronged and friendless orphan. "What can I do? I must, I will, do something to circumvent Mr. Ashley." Then a bright thought seemed to stay both her steps and breath.

Only a moment did she hesitate, and then walked hurriedly to the office, where she was sure to find Mr. Hanscome, the agent, who, as she understood it, could dictate certain terms to all in the company's employ.

Mr. Hanscome received her kindly, relieving her embarrassment by asking, "If she would speak to him on business matters."

"I came, sir," she answered, "to solicit your influence in obtaining work for a young girl thrown out of employment."

By a few questions Mr. Hanscome gathered from her the facts, then dismissed her, promising his attention to the subject during the day.

The result was all that Annie desired. Two days later Celia Burnap commenced work for Mr. Sanford, where she became a general favorite, more particularly, at a later day, of Henry Flint, a young man entering the employ of Mr. Sanford, of unknown parentage, but gaining respect by his manly bearing and unquestionable habits.

Edith smiled as she saw her wishes so unexpectedly granted.

"Ah!" thought she, "the dear girl must understand Ashley now. She has too much good sense to forget, too much pride to forgive. I need not trouble more on her account."

This conclusion was hasty, the affair proving only a lovers' quarrel, resulting in a few pouty weeks, then sidelong glances, certain prelude to peace and confidence.

CHAPTER XI.

*The Maker saw, took pity, and bestowed
Woman, the last, the best reserved of God.
A wife! ah, gentle deities, can he
That has a wife, e'er feel adversity?*

*Not Cynthia, when her mantua's pinned awry,
E'er felt such rage.*

—POPE.

Two years of Annie's factory life passed without a visit to her home. Frequent letters informed her of a new prosperity, coming at the latest hour, to the hopeful mother, the trusting wife. The pet, brother Ned, had grown to a robust boy, while the father, cheered by the pleasure of providing for his own family, had become more like the Harry of other days, ere he was overtaken by folly and sin.

The young girl desired the presence of her kindred, yet she toiled on in silence. Necessity had driven her to Lewiston, where she had found employment in its cotton mills. The strong will that had led her to take the first step kept her at her monotonous labor. She had, in those two years, learned much of life—learned what she had only heard before. But, alas! she often regretted that, amid life's changing scenes and its increasing

cares, many things she had learned from books, were slipping imperceptibly from her memory. But books could only start the education of life. One must think, and those who think will always learn.

Two years before she had made a willing sacrifice—yea, a joyful giving up of dearest pleasure. She thought she had counted the cost, but experience alone could tell its length and breadth. But there was another side—she had learned the sweets of an independent life, and, that by closest economy, she had been able to lay by a trifle for future exigencies, whatever they might be.

Two years had passed ere Annie felt that prudence would justify a respite from labor and the expenses of a journey to Holman, her native town.

"You are getting miserly," remarked Edith, as she noticed Annie carefully counting the contents of her purse.

"Not so, but as I am to start for Holman in a few days I must guess at my expenses and calculate the money required to meet them."

"You will not go till I am ready to leave this dear little room, where we have learned to love each other so well. Listen, and I will tell you. Wallace and I have decided that you must be present at our marriage, and go with us on our short wedding tour and come back with us to our new home just outside the din of the town. Then you will have two homes—one at Holman and the other with me. We hope to add to your comfort, and shall try to make you happier every day. You may as well say yes, without trying to find an excuse. We are set upon it, so allow the invitation to be sent at once to Mr. Ashley to act as best man on that occasion."

"It surprises me," replied Annie, "that your long-cherished and unfavorable opinion of Mr. Ashley should suffer you to think of him as one of the very few to be present at your marriage."

"There are times," replied Edith, "when the bias of our judgment should do obeisance to the stronger passions of others. That you love Mr. Ashley

"With a sweet idolatry enslaving all the soul,"

I know without an assuring word from your lips.

"Though I may think him inferior in all goodness, yet for your sake I will try and 'write his errors in the sand.' If he proves worthy of you I shall be well pleased. If he does not, it would be vain to tell you so; it would not change your mind or alter your course. Opposition in affairs is sure to make them worse."

"Your words have a hopeful gentleness. Are they earnest, or are they only a ruse by which you would gain a special end?"

"My Annie cannot think what I have said of her lover over-spiced with flattery. I am most sincere in saying, if he will lay aside his selfish autocracy, and treat you with the consideration your virtues merit, however lightly he may think of other women—their proper sphere of service and dependence—if he will never embitter your life with such demonstrations, I will respect him, yea, will forget that my dearest cousin suffered from neglect and want of sympathy."

Edith was to be married in a week. To Annie those seven days seemed but a point of time, so quickly did they speed away. A sense of loneliness came over her as she twined the orange blossoms in the dark tresses of Edith's hair, but she could not hold her longer. Time would not stay a single sand. All had gathered in the quiet parlor of Mrs. Barlow, and, as the grey-haired pastor looked benignly on this lamb of his flock, his voice became tenderly affectionate as he asked the King of kings to bind in sweetest truth these confiding hearts. Lifting his bowed head and brushing the thin locks from his furrowed brow, he gave the frail orphan one to the bosom of a kind protector and

husband. Resting a hand on the head of each as they knelt before him, he added:

*"If ye would be happy,
Confide, love and be patient, be faithful, firm and holy."*

Once more his eyes were closed while he asked the blessing of heaven on this new relation and its watchful care over another home in his loved parish.

Edith had desired a quiet wedding, unattended by display, and arranged that their bridal tour should be a few days' trip to the seashore, accompanied by Annie and Mr. Ashley.

To this Annie looked forward with pleasure, for she had never seen the ocean, never watched its slightly swelling waves, bearing forward the laden ship, the white canvas growing more indistinct, till the eye could no longer follow its course on its errand to other lands far over the trackless main. She had never stood on the pebbled beach and drank in the full beauty and splendor of a cloudless sunrise, its bright rays studding as with myriads of diamonds the stretching sheet of water. Nor yet, from some overhanging cliff, clad by Time in his own hoary garb, had she peered forth in the misty gloom and darkness of gathering storm. The fitful sighing of the wind, the fury of the increasing tempest and the mad surging of the resistless waves were, to her, unknown teachers of the Omnipotent, able, not only to create, but keep in unvarying harmony his multitude of works.

One could not be expected to learn from all these various lessons in the first short visit to the coast.

Without a frown from the storm-god, or a glimpse of old Neptune in a rage, the party returned to Lewiston, bringing fair-weather memories of the bridal party and their brief excursion.

"Do you leave in the morning train?" asked Mr. Ashley, as he handed Annie from the carriage at the door of Edith's home.

"Yes," answered Annie; "neither wind nor weather can coax a longer delay. Only think! it is more than two years since I have seen my mother, my dear, good father, or darling Ned. Even now his last kiss seems warm on my lips. Ere this time to-morrow I hope to see them, be with them in the dear old home."

Tears sparkled in the eyes of the loving girl, but Mr. Ashley did not understand ecstasies; his frigid nature was in array against all combinations of smiles and tears, so, touching lightly his hat, as he bowed with marked precision, he wished Annie a pleasant journey, and, throwing himself into the carriage, commenced a hasty drive to the town.

Woman can bear indignities with forgiving bravery while she is sure there can be no record of her folly—can proudly endure while there are none to know. But Annie had not even this sustaining comfort in her trials. Mr. and Mrs. Fletcher had both seen and heard and looked wonderingly on Mr. Ashley till the door of his carriage was closed and he was driven from the place.

Edith looked anxiously into Annie's face as she said:

"Training for some eastern court where freezing formalities are the only virtues required."

"Are you not severe?" asked the husband of his little wife, when Annie had left for her chamber without speaking.

"It may be, but if she could see with my eyes."

"You regard with dislike, she with love. It needs no prophet's ken to see that Ashley, worthy or not, is quite indispensable to her happiness."

A thoughtful silence shaded for a moment Edith's face. Then, raising her tearful eyes to her husband, she said:

"Better without than with him. Better that her eye should dim and its light go out in the home of love, than, like the first Mrs. Ashley, shrink, disgusted, to the grave, from a husband she can no longer respect."

"Where," asked Wallace, drawing Edith more closely to his

side, "is your trust in that wisdom which providentially disposes of these little earthly matters?"

"Not dead," replied Edith, "only staggered a trifle by circumstances that I cannot understand."

Poor human nature, how easy to look upward when there is no veil of mystery, no cloud of thick darkness around the great white throne of the Invisible.

"You will be back again in a few weeks," remarked Wallace Fletcher, as he placed a ticket for Bradford in Annie's hand on the following morning and left her with a smiling good-by.

The novelty of starting over, the young traveller was in no mood to note particularly her fellow-passengers. Fairly out of Lewiston she became dull and dreamy, scarcely knowing her own thoughts, or if she thought at all. The unfavorable contrast between her accepted lover and the husband of her friend forced itself on her mind, producing an involuntary shudder. To Ashley's coolness of the previous night she could add the neglect of the morning, while Wallace Fletcher had attended her to the cars and seen her off with many manifestations of kindness. At a small way-station Annie was surprised by a stranger, who, till then, had occupied an opposite seat. Rudely pushing her travelling-bag aside, he settled himself in its place, remarking:

"The sun's amazing hot over that ar' side," and bringing forth a red cotton handkerchief, began brushing the particles of dust that had gathered in caucus on the front of a white shirt.

"As I was going to the city," he went on, "thought I must wear a b'iled shirt, spick and span when I started, but just ye look at the pesky dirt on it now. Better wear'd my black and white gingham and took this along."

A smile danced in the dark eyes of Annie as she turned squarely around and looked from the window.

"Have a doughnut, young woman," and a slight nudge in the side notified the "young woman" for whom these words were

intended. A simple negative and Annie turned again to the window.

"Or a hunk of gingerbread? The old woman is a staving good cook," and from the depths of his capacious pocket he produced the "hunk" in a soiled paper.

"I had breakfast before I started," was the only answer—unless the indignant look and deeply-flushed face told of many suppressed words.

"Oh, then, you did. Started from whar, did you say? Well, no matter if you can't think. Some folks do ferget names. Maybe you're going to Bradford?"

A grudging "yes," and for the first time Annie looked fairly in the face of her querist. She instinctively shrank from the hard, sinister expression, that reminded her painfully of some unpleasant epoch in the past which she could not place or quite recall.

"Live thar?"

"No, sir."

"Oh, then, you don't. Going thar to stay a spell? Well, Bradford is a right smart place. I'm expecting to go representative this fall and I shall be thar quite a spell. Mebbe I'll get time to call on ye. Le's see—your father's name. Think I've heard tell. Man about my age? I'm forty-six. How old are you, young woman?"

"This familiarity," replied Annie, "is very disagreeable. Anything more in the line will be considered a breach of courtesy."

"I swow, if ye ain't scared to tell yer age. Gals don't ginerally begin to squirm till they are thirty year, or thar'about."

Here the conductor came around, and the inquisitive man found that Annie Wilmot was booked for Holman.

"Thar," he exclaimed, "how curi's that I should find this out without asking a word. Things do work round kind of funny sometimes. You know the Sherman family, William Sherman, I mean? That's my brother. Guess I shall run up thar tu-morrer

to see my boy Bill. He was named for his uncle, and has lived thar a year er more, with his uncle, he has. They take quite a shine to him, 'cause he's spunky like, and long-headed, no mistake, if he is my boy. That George of theirs was never very cute at anything but circulating tin that his dad had drummed up. Lucky dog, that father of his. All he teched turned to money, and he never had no holes in his pockets nuther. Kalkerlate they're at the top of the heap in Holman and got cash enough to keep um thar. How's that?"

'Tis said the heel of Achilles was his only vulnerable point, and there is never wanting a Paris to inflict the dart. So with Annie Wilmot, usually gentle and lovely, the name of Sherman was her vulnerable point and never failed to rouse within her bosom a whirlwind of wrath. Pale and excited, she sought for self-control as she answered:

"I cannot answer for a town or even a neighborhood."

"What's up now that makes you so techy? Any heart trouble 'tween you and that George? Don't mind, the young whipper-snapper will come all right."

"A heart trouble with George Sherman!" said Annie, while her face shone with that livid pallor seen by the elder Sherman three years before as he stood with her face to face, in her father's home.

"A heart affair with George Sherman, the man I despise above all others? I hated always the miserable creature for his own degraded self, for the lack of every noble quality, the absence of every virtue. Nor is his father one whit his superior in goodness; grey-haired in dishonesty and fraud, his hands steeped in iniquity, and his garments stained with the unrepented sins of threescore years! This is William Sherman. Nor can the money of your brother, though counted by millions, command respect for either him or his son."

"Well, s'posen you don't like him; guess nobody cares. You needn't show so much darnder about it. Shouldn't wonder if

you'd been off to work in the Lewiston factory, and guess William Sherman won't care what such gals think about him."

"Silence!" spoke Annie, quite losing her self-control. "I will listen to no further insult, even though you know no better; and may forever and a day drift down the ages ere the name of Sherman shall be again forced on my unwilling ears. I have not sought this interview, and here let it end. Leave me to myself and feelings of disgust at the thought of a character too contemptible for words."

"Might as well let her have her own way and say," muttered the Sherman brother, as he changed his seat for one more remote from the scene of his late encounter. "Hate to have a fuss, though I ain't any afraid of gitting hit; she's nothing but a gal, anyhow, and it's an awful shame and disgrace fer her to talk so sarcy to a man. But, like all the rest of the wimmin, she's got brass and tongue enough to have the last word in spite of fate."

Annie, left to herself, shrank abashed from the notice her angry words had drawn towards her. Those near her were surprised, but none cared to question her, so she was allowed to sit in silence during the remainder of her ride.

At Bradford she found the old yellow coach, not having been driven from its long-travelled road by modern and more rapid conveyance. It was a crazy, rattling old vehicle, dilapidated by time and service, but not, like the "one hoss chaise," fallen to utter ruin.

To Annie it was fraught with a home-like atmosphere, bringing a cozy feeling of content as she seated herself on its ragged cushions and moved slowly over the road to Holman.

Along the way everything was charmed with soothing familiarity; the old rocks, with their moss-patches a little larger; the board fences, enclosing wood-lot and dividing lawn, while the shrubby bushes waved in the same places they had occupied since her earliest infancy.

Even the Sherman residence, seen in the distance, was like an

old friend. Why should it be otherwise? Harry Wilmot had planned its conveniences and much of its surrounding beauty. Yet its doors were closed against him, while his first-born must, in silent regret, pass its threshold to a humble residence beyond its shadow. Would it always be so? A new thought cheered the heart of the weary girl, as, for one brief moment, she hoped the former possessions of her family might at some future period be redeemed from the grasp of strangers. The idea was too absurd, too improbable for encouragement. Yet she knew their repossession would be undertaken by an enterprising man as mere pastime and play.

She had not time to think long, to weigh the possible against the impossibles connected with her desire for an exchange of homes ere the old yellow coach stopped before the wicket-gate and left her by the narrow foot-path whence it had taken her two years before.

Forgetting all the past; its joyous and less pleasant scenes; alike thoughtless of the future, Annie knew only the present—the blessed reunion with her family and friends.

They had changed in the months that had passed, but there was a reflection of more comfort and happiness, brighter hopes and higher expectations.

"You, my darling," said the thoughtful mother, "are looking thin. Where are the rosy cheeks you carried away?"

"Not thinner," replied Annie, "than the working girl usually returns after a long term of service. My health is unimpaired, and a short rest from hard labor will recall the runaway roses whose absence you deplore. In your joy and anxiety you seem to forget the very important item of supper." Turning towards the neatly-laid table she continued: "You cannot know how much, at the close of a weary day, I have pined, even wept, to sit with you at this evening meal. Not that Mrs. Barlow failed to provide sufficient food, but it was not this, not your little, old table, arranged for the four comprising our family."

Seating themselves in humble gratitude every heart whispered amen, as the father's voice was heard in thanksgiving for the rich blessing of that eventide.

Questions followed, incidents were related, till, wearied with much talking, Mr. Wilmot retired for the night. Then the mother and daughter sat alone by the smouldering, dying embers.

"I cannot," said Mrs. Wilmot, "allow you to sleep without hearing the report of Eddie's manly conduct; of the faithfulness with which he at first performed the lesser, and afterwards the more important, duties in the store of Mr. Allen.

"Enlarging his business last winter, instead of procuring another clerk, he gave to 'baby Ned' the post occupied by his own Fred the year before he left for college."

"Does Mr. Allen think so much of the child?" asked the gratified sister.

"We know our neighbor too well to think he would pretend a confidence he did not feel, nor would he advance an idle, worthless boy. He often says, 'Annie must be made to concede to the old man the wisdom his grey hairs have earned.' You thought the child too young and frail for the place; with the evidence of Eddie's two-years' trial against you, Mr. Allen thinks to draw from you a confession of ignorance in the art of training young boys. So be prepared for a banter when you meet."

"I hope my brother's success is beyond a doubt, but I prefer waiting awhile before admitting my fault, or saying that Eddie's entrance into Mr. Allen's store at the age of twelve years was a judicious step."

"Neither you nor Mr. Allen will yield a point that can be sustained; there may be a chance to test your argumentative powers."

That night Annie slept in her own room, satisfied with its plain, cheap furniture, and content with the narrow cot on which she lay: Separation had taught her the value of friends; that **above all riches is the priceless gift of a mother's love.**

CHAPTER XII.

*There is a pleasing dread in the fashion of all mysteries,
For hope is mixed therein and fear; who shall divine their issue?*

—TUPPER.

Two weeks of Annie's home visit slipped away before she found a convenient time for spending a day with Mrs. Allen at her own home.

Fred was there, slightly indisposed, yet not sufficiently ill to reduce the usual number of stories, collected by a life from home, especially the first year in college.

All day she talked and listened, till the fading light and deepening shadows reminded her that she was to walk home with her brother after his usual hour for closing business for the night.

The friends parted with pleasant good-nights, Annie going to Mr. Allen's store, which she reached in season to notice Eddie's unusual silence, and a troubled expression, as he looked carefully to the closing of shutters and bolting of doors.

"What annoys you?" asked the sister, as they gained the street.

"I do not know that I can exactly tell. You know that father and Mr. Allen drove to Bradford this afternoon. I have been alone, yet there has been a mysterious leak in the money drawer. Fifty cents have 'broken jail,' or in some way escaped from the drawer, and what is yet more perplexing, elude thus far the efforts of a rigorous search."

"Only fifty cents?" said the sister, relieved by the smallness

of the sum. "You have made a mistake in the goods sold or money taken."

"That cannot be. The goods with their prices are all marked on the slate. To place the matter beyond doubt, it is a bright half dollar that is missing, paid me by Miss Bancroft for a linen handkerchief."

"You must have dropped it outside, instead of depositing it in the drawer," suggested the sister.

"Impossible again, for I noticed its bright, shiny look in the drawer, and compared it with the dull coins among which it fell."

"Have there been other boys in the store?"

"Only Will Sherman."

"Quite enough. Ned, I am displeased with the intimacy between yourself and that boy. Evil will come of it, if it has not already."

"You are not just. Will is but a nephew of old Bill, not in any way like him, or George. The boys all think him a good fellow, though like the rest of us he may inherit some bad traits. Even Mr. Allen says, if he could be surrounded by different persons and influences, he would make a fine man. That he had nothing to do with the money I am very sure, as he left the store while I was talking with Miss Bancroft."

"Have you been out of the store?"

"When Miss Bancroft left, I took her bundles to the carriage, but there was no one in the store at the time. You see, I have a fine little matter here for the inspection of father and Mr. Allen within the next half hour, if they return from town so soon, or to-morrow morning at farthest. What will be done I do not know."

"According to your story, no hand but yours has entered the money drawer. I think of only one thing you can do."

"What is that? Go back and wait for Mr. Allen?"

"I do not see the need of waiting for Mr. Allen. You must

have lost the money in some way, and, of course, will be expected to make it good. We will return and do this, by leaving a half dollar from your own pocket. In that way we may leave things all right for scrutiny."

"I wonder I had not thought of that sooner," said the boy as he turned in the direction of the store, where fifty cents from his small savings were taken to replace the missing money.

"You are letting this matter trouble you quite too much," said Annie, as they walked toward their home. "It is all right now, while you have learned from it a lesson of greater care in the future."

"I am not satisfied. It may be right with Mr. Allen, but not with me. As for the lesson, I see no chance for learning, till I understand wherein I have done wrong or have been careless."

"You will understand it all some time. These little things work themselves to light in due season. It is only a trifle, so do not brood over it longer."

Little things may bring about great good or evil. The sister did not know how much her unwise counsel might hasten and augment the one great sorrow hanging over her future.

As they approached the Sherman residence, a sickly light glimmering faintly from the curtained windows, reminded Eddie of the severe illness of its mistress. Turning to Annie, he asked if the Allens had heard from the sick Mrs. Sherman during the evening.

"I know nothing about it," was her indifferent reply. "Is she more than usually feeble?"

"Dr. Meags spoke of her case in the store. He thinks she must die very soon."

"Indeed! Yet I suppose the doctor's judgment may be in fault. It would be quite unlike the members of that family to do the world a kindness by a hasty and final exit."

"Oh, Annie, what ails you? The moment the name of Sherman is mentioned you fly off in the most extravagant freaks,

unlike yourself, and quite as strange as anything the Shermans ever do. I only repeated what the doctor said, though I was about to add something more, if your harsh and unfeeling words had not frightened me into silence."

"Bravo! for a boy scarce in his teens. Please recall your frightened thoughts; I will remain a quiet listener so long as you may choose to talk."

"I was going to say, the worst thing I know in Willie is the disrespect in which he holds his sick relative. He never speaks of the family to me, but I sometimes hear him talking with the other boys.

"It seems the sick woman was not willing that Master Will should remain so long as one of her family, having an idea that her husband and son desired to make of him a kind of tool by which to accomplish some disagreeable plan, its real nature remaining a mystery. I think the boy may understand, or he would not so quietly remain an apple of discord between the husband and wife. Thus matters stood when the aunt became unusually ill from an attack of pneumonia. With her first alarming symptoms came an increased anxiety concerning Willie. Failing to influence her husband, she ventured to ask the nephew if he would not like to go to a boys' school, where he would get a better knowledge of books and business matters generally. He replied that he had no fancy for boys' schools, that his uncle did not advise it—that a man would know better than a woman, etc. What does my sister Annie think of this; can she guess its meaning?"

"There is, indeed, a mystery, if you stop here. Is there nothing more?"

"Nothing explanatory, only more of the same sort. Yesterday, when the doctor told Mrs. Sherman that she would not probably live a week, she asked for another interview with her husband. The young namesake, either by accident or design, heard nearly all that passed between them. It was the old topic

of changing a course she had always felt to be wrong, then she began to tell him how different life and its transactions looked in the dawning light of eternity. At this point the husband became very angry, and like the Peter of whom we read, began to curse and swear that he was capable of making his own plans and looking after all business matters, things he intended to do, in spite of any fidgety old woman. She, he said, might go on with her job without any interference; nor stop her dying to look after him or fuss about consequences."

"Horrible!" exclaimed Annie, shocked that any one could stand thus hardened in the presence of death. "An hour cometh," she continued, "when he shall await the last messenger. Then will he pray to forget, and turn from memory as from

——— *'a frightful fiend
That close behind him treads.'*

"I have thought of Mrs. Sherman as the counterpart of her husband, cherishing his ideas and leagued with him in sin."

"She must have been, to some extent, else she could not have known his plans. She says things look different in the light of another world, and may repent now."

"Did you know," asked Annie, as they stood by the gate leading to their home, "that father once owned the Sherman farm?"

"Yes," replied the boy, "and would that Fortune might again turn it into his hands. Its repossession will be a matter of no particular haste, if the rest of you follow my example, and dispose of the half dollars after the fashion of to-day."

Entering the house, the brother and sister separated for the night, Eddie to fret a few moments, then close his eyes to all perplexing care and thought; but the sister sat in the stilly hours, reflecting sadly on the events of the evening.

A night of undisturbed slumber left on the brow of Annie no traces of unwonted anxiety. But her smiles were succeeded

by vexation, when she saw the inquisitive and censorious Miss Meags in the path leading to her humble home.

"Dr. Meags' wife and sister are coming to call on us," remarked Mrs. Wilmot, who had noticed their approach from a window. "It has been a long time since they were here."

"And I am sorry they are coming now," replied the daughter. "The call is prompted by curiosity, not friendship. I remember my last examination—when Miss Meags called my father a drunkard, in a whisper she knew must reach my ears."

"Annie," whispered the mother, "they are neighbors—treat them pleasantly. *Remember.*"

Mrs. Wilmot received the ladies in a quiet way, while Annie forced a smile she had no desire to feel. While Miss Meags took an invoice of the room, noting in it whatever might be of modern date, the doctor's wife engaged Annie in a quiet talk. Schools were discussed, those of Lewiston compared with like institutions in Bradford and other large towns. Evening schools, just coming into favor with the public mind, as a means of education which could not be overrated, for those whose time was wholly occupied during the day. On these points, and many others, Mrs. Meags found Annie well versed and intelligent. Next the conversation drifted to politics, a subject on which the young girl pretended no accurate knowledge, though she had a fair understanding of the questions of the day—that of slavery being the most notable. They touched lightly on State rights as advocated by Van Buren and others—its effect on the Southern mind, the acquisition of Mexican territory, the bitter strife between North and South—brought on by the peculiar institution. Annie quite surprised her visitors by the general intelligence displayed on subjects to which they had found time to give little more than a passing thought. Their call was not long, but cordial and pleasant, and on leaving, they expressed a wish that Annie would join their one literary club and meet with them while at home—though that time should be limited to a few weeks.

"Mother, dear, did I remember just all you wished?" asked Annie, after her visitors had left.

A smile lit the face of Mrs. Wilmot, for, though she did not say so, she was indeed very proud of her child.

"Very well, my daughter, better than I feared. I know your strong likes and dislikes—your impulsive nature, and that you still hug in all its freshness the memory of that examination in which Miss Meags figured so largely; and I feared, if she said a disagreeable thing, your answer would be abrupt. Dr. and Mrs. Meags have been very kind and sympathetic in many dark days of sickness and trouble, and not by a single word would I wound the sensitive feelings of one who has done so generously by me."

"Your respect for Dr. and Mrs. Meags cannot exceed my own. I have no reason to think ill of either, but I do not like the doctor's sister."

"I have not thought you made the least effort to do so."

"I admit that I have not. The ghost of that examination has always haunted me. A thought of it brings the perspiration from every pore. It always was, and always must be a dark spot in my life. Not a red letter day—but a black letter day—that admits of no extenuating light. When I was struggling hard with life, Miss Meags was not the only one who looked on and regarded me with indifference, to use no stronger word. Our minister, whom I was taught to behold reverently from the most remote corner of his church, who should not have been a respecter of persons, knew that we had very little of this world's goods; but how he gained that knowledge was a mystery to me, as he never came to see if misery or comfort was the presiding genius of our home."

"You forget, my child; he was here on one occasion."

"No, mother, I remember. Our dear loved Nina sickened and died, without a call from him. By invitation he attended the last sad rites. He took her to the dark portals of the grave

veiled in impenetrable gloom, and there he left her. Nor voice nor one ray of hope beyond. The child, he said, had been blessed with opportunities which he hoped she had improved. Our duty was submission to the All Wise, who could do no injustice. Sweet words of consolation these, to my wild, if not rebellious heart. Had he forgotten that scarce a twelvemonth before his own boy sickened and died of brain fever, delirium being one of the first symptoms. To be sure, he fasted and prayed, and then came forth, his face radiant with hope and trust. The boy had been given to God in infancy, was a child of the covenant, and the Father could not reject His own. That was his child; our darling, Nina, of another household."

"In your language, one fails to discover any lingering of that reverence you say you once felt for our minister."

"Because I have learned to render unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.

"I have not forgotten Mr. Merten (as chairman of a committee) gave me a book for reading a prize essay; and what has become of that book? Are you keeping it as a precious souvenir?"

"A souvenir—by which to remember both your faults and Mr. Merten's. You think almost morbidly of those days; you were but a little girl."

"Three years ago my long frocks and flannels were laid aside, were they not?"

"Pardon me, Annie, without thinking, it seems much longer ago than three years. But you were young and always so quiet and shrinking, none could know you had any ambition beyond the position you then occupied."

"I know, mother," replied Annie, "the minister's duties are arduous, his time and strength often overtaxed, yet I cannot think it was quite nice for Mr. Merten to ignore me entirely and wait for the full development of a character that needed encouragement, needed kindness to warm and mould it, love to engraft its own fair image and teach the new commandment in the beauty of

its perfect excellence. I have learned this at Lewiston. Mr. Allen is with his people in joy and sorrow; is of his people, and his every word of sympathy is heartfelt and expressing sincerity and truth."

"Perhaps you judge hastily, forgetting that some natures are less amiable than others, and consequently have more faults with which to battle."

"I suppose," replied Annie, "that ministers are human, and, like their fellows, subject to temptation. If they overcome much, some of them must have started with a heavier load than burdened Bunyan's Pilgrim."

"But let's lay the ministers on the shelf, and tell me who that man can be who, in the distance, looks so much like William Sherman?"

"It is William Sherman," replied Mrs. Wilmot.

"Coming this way—not here, I hope."

"Don't trouble, my dear. Knowing that you are at home, there is little danger that he will come nearer than the street."

"Look—he has a shovel and a pick. Oh, mother! he cannot be going to the cemetery."

"Why do you think of the cemetery? He has never done any work there."

"Oh, I don't know, I cannot tell."

For a moment both gazed from the window till the Sherman identity was certain and the shovel unmistakable. Annie was the first to speak.

"Can it be Mrs. Sherman is dead, and that wretched old heathen, to save a few dollars, is going to the cemetery to dig her grave?"

"No," replied the mother; "his heart is hard enough, but he would hardly dare insult public opinion to that extent."

"Dare! Show me a dastardly act he would not do if he could get, or save, a dollar. Where else can he be going with that shovel? I tell you 'tis so."

Later they learned from a neighbor they had guessed but half the truth—that Sherman was not only digging a grave for his wife, but speaking of her in the most heartless manner.

“Always had fussed about being sick er sunthing; spent more property than she helped git; was up nights whining about newraligy in her head. Might just as well been erbed as to burn out so much wood and wear out shoe leather. Then this last time, folks made such a towse, the doctor had to come three times; didn’t do no good. Then there’s the coffin and I don’t know what else. It’s just shameful. But one thing is sure—I shall do the digging myself—what dif’rence does it make who shovels dirt?”

For a few days indignation in Holman was at fever heat, and the night after the funeral exercises, from a wholesome fear of tar and feathers, William Sherman was not at home to any callers, nor was he seen for many days. When, at last, he mingled again with his townspeople, his boastful ways and defiant look had given place to an appearance of sullen dread and apprehension.

The weeks allotted for Annie’s stay in Holman wore away and she looked forward to a second separation with more of the unpleasant than she had known with the first good-by. Then she was excited by an uncertainty connecting itself with her future. That had settled to a better understanding of her course, while her two years in Lewiston had secured her many friends to whose society she looked forward with pleasure, disturbed only by a thought of Mr. Ashley and the few little missives that had reached her from his pen. Exact and formal, they came like the premature snow to the lingering flower. Without one tithe of her deep feeling, he was satisfied with a few dashes of the pen. He had nothing better to offer for woman’s undying faith and trust.

“Must you leave us so soon?” asked Harry Wilmot of his daughter, as he saw her in a travelling suit. “It seems but a few days since you came from Lewiston.”

“Yet it is several weeks. If I should remain longer the sight of

my packed trunks would give me the same blue thoughts. I never encourage homesick feelings, yet they will come sometimes. These must be shortlived, as the exhilarating ride and balmy air of summer must compel their leave-taking before I reach Bradford."

"The old coach has come, looking worse than ever," said Eddie, as he entered the house from their little garden. "Here is the last rose of summer. You need no souvenir, but this is like me—an opening bud—which, to carry the figure out, some rude hand may nip before the unfolding of ambition's designs."

With tearful thanksgiving the sister took the fading emblem, which was to increase in value, when, in coming years, hope and imagination should be lost in an unguided search for the absent boy.

Annie's farewells were choked and brief and her ride to Bradford lonely, for she was too sad to appreciate the whistling of the driver or the sweeter music of the summer birds.

Her trip accomplished in safety, she alighted at the home of Alice Barlow, where she again met her old friends. Even the little Agnes—scarce six years old—came with her sweetest kiss, while one little arm around her neck almost suffocated Annie in its circling caress.

Edith Fletcher, unchanged by worldly smiles and prosperity, rejoiced at her coming, while the husband, who had learned to respect Annie for her controlling virtues, welcomed her to his home of plenty, asking, as his only reward, a continued love for the orphaned one who sometimes nestled so sadly in his kind, protecting arms.

"Have you seen Mr. Ashley?" asked Edith the evening after Annie's arrival.

"No, but as I have failed to notify him of my presence in town he cannot be considered guilty of transgressing any law, either of common usage or promise."

"I wish you would allow him to remain in ignorance of your

whereabouts. Believe me, though he may be innocent now, he is a perfect Gentile in all external observances and worse than a Pharisee at heart."

"I have hoped my two best friends might be drawn nearer together and learn to love each other better during my absence, but I see they are not. I trust it is only the old heedlessness of Mr. Ashley, not a new deviation which annoys you."

"Annie, dear, I know a love like yours—charitable and generous—cannot be turned from its strong current by any tale of mine. Do not think I cling to the past, with the pertinacity of unforgiving hate. I could forget, if it did not too faithfully mirror the present and future of my dear Annie. Mr. Ashley has no feeling in common with the finely organized woman. He would elevate her only as the animal next in order above the dusky skins, whom he has seen spell-bound at the sound of his voice, powerless against any indignity tortured into existence by the Anglo-Saxon. That he considers you a common working woman, honored by his fitful attention I have no doubt. Not to be too select, too closely bound to one, he has seen fit to choose a second fair one with whom I suppose you are to share his love after the patriarchal style, or that of the Brigham Young of later time."

"Edith, your frankness sometimes grieves me. I know you mean well, your motives and intentions are good, but, excuse me, if I sometimes think your head quite in error. You are wont to credit the idle say-sos going the rounds and gaining a little with every rehearsal, but in Mr. Ashley's case your prejudice overcomes your judgment. Do not infer from this that I regard him as a paragon of perfections. However numerous his faults, I am sure they diverge widely from your recent assertion. It is a newly-coined gossip, on which I have no fears of giving a heedless or premature verdict, since his attentions to others have never caused me uneasiness. On the contrary, I have many times regretted his lack of courtesy to the different ladies of my acquaintance."

"It is not his courteous behavior which has excited the notice and called for the censure of your friends. One may be gentlemanly and civil to all, yet not compromise his honor—not by false or improper acts forswear the most sacred obligations. We cannot well debate this subject without a fresh reference to those newly-coined facts, rejected unheard by you, but which have aroused so vividly my past resentment."

"Allow me a word just here," interrupted Wallace, as he drew his chair nearer his young wife. "'Tis not the thing to trouble Annie with all this gossip—not to-night, if ever. Let her have one restful night after her long ride."

"You are right, Wallace, but, oh, I have thought of it so much I could not wait till to-morrow, quite forgetting that Annie must be tired."

"Not so very tired," replied Annie, "and since I have heard in part I should be quite as impatient as you, if I am compelled to wait. Now go on, please, and tell me all."

"Yes, I will do so, more with vexation than pleasure. I was about to say that soon as you were out of town Mr. Ashley discovered new and engaging traits in the character of Kate Sommers, who, you remember, roused your ill-will, or, rather, dread of her, by the unwarranted attack she made on your home-braided hat. The horror with which Mr. Ashley had so often turned from Kate's fun and inexcusable mischief became changed in a twinkling to admiration of what he had so lately disliked and shunned. It would be useless for me to tell of the loving looks he managed to emit from his sunken eye, or the little words and deeds that followed, all of which are understood better by experience than explanation. Passing over the preliminaries, let us hurry to the result, which was an invitation to accompany him to Princeland with a party of excursionists, who, from that city, were going a few miles by boat to a pleasant island, where they were to enjoy a picnic dinner, dance, etc. Kate, without caring a straw for the unwomanly part she was about to act, told

of this invitation to others, saying that for your sake she might refuse him were not the temptation to wring the unwilling dollar from his conglutinated pocket too strong for resistance."

"Edith, you cannot quite credit every link in this long chain of absurdities. In the first place, Mr. Ashley is the last person to become entangled in the web of Kate's devices, because he understands her wary skill. Then, he has such a dread of excursions. I once heard him say that he would prefer the chance for enjoyment and convenience with some caravan crossing Sahara before a modern party of excursionists. It is all so unlike him and his peculiar ideas and habits."

"I have heard Mr. Ashley express his condemnatory opinion of Kate and excursions, but the process of change in the mind of man is sometimes wonderfully rapid, according to circumstances. You will be convinced that what I have told you, and, verily, much more, is true, though his late trip may have failed in influencing his heart to greater complacency toward Kate or excursions. Kate accepted the invitation, and, as she is not the bird to be caged, when they reached the island, finding her tall, commanding escort growing sullen and exacting, she cast about for more entertaining friends. With her usual success she obtained her wish, when, leaving the lover of nature to watch as the waves crept nearer and the rude rocks were being hidden under the rising tide, she wandered away with Warren Gould, returning an hour later with young Morgan, who resigned her to the waiting Ashley in season for dinner. At the table he was chillingly polite. When the merits of chowder and cake had been fully tested, as he took no steps for the amusement of Kate, he had the pleasure of seeing her again led away by yet another gentleman to join the dancers, who were forming the first set at a short distance. From that time Ashley walked around, deaf, dumb and blind in appearance, probably meditating on the punishment to be inflicted on the wayward girl.

"Kate, having danced to her heart's content, severed a small curl

from the tangled masses of her hair, which she confined to a soiled and torn glove she had taken from her hand, then walked in the direction of Mr. Ashley, who, noticing her approach, turned abruptly round and gave his attention to other objects. This movement was both desired and anticipated by Kate. By the aid of a pin, which she used as a hook, the soiled glove, with its curly appendage, was soon flying from the skirt of the departing coat, exciting the merriment of the whole party. Without waiting for any discovery by Mr. Ashley, she hastened to the shore, paid a boatman to take her to the city in season for the regular train, which arrived here an hour before the excursion was expected. The last prank is so characteristic of the jilting Kate I think you will not attempt to reason it away—you must believe it. Can your loving heart do itself the injustice to sympathize with the angry, mortified man, whose cold life-stream might quicken a little, as he found himself matched by a woman? Or will you, like me, find a kind of glad pleasure in his sufferings of that day, asking that the humiliation may be followed by frequent and effective blows?"

"Angry people are never sane. Why ask me to express an opinion springing from impulse instead of reflection?"

No other word was spoken. The clock ticked steadily on, careless of heartaches and tears, till it told the accustomed hour of retiring for rest and sleep.

Gratitude warmed the heart of Mrs. Fletcher as she left a good-night kiss on the cheek of her friend.

"Her eyes are opened," she said as she joined her husband. "She must rebel against further neglect and insult from the unworthy Ashley."

When left to herself, Annie, covering her face with her hands, wept long and bitterly. Rising at length from the low ottoman on which she had been sitting, she walked nervously to and fro in the quiet room, whose subdued light seemed pitying and mournful. Her throbbing heart beat wildly on as duty and inclination strug-

gled for victory. Nature wearied with the conflict. Pride and her better judgment gave way to her strong, uncontrollable love. Sinking on a sofa she murmured in real despair:

"I cannot live without him. Edith has loved, why has she so little pity for me? Could she live without Wallace?"

Then came a thought of the character of the man to whom Edith clung with devotion and trust.

"There is but one Wallace Fletcher," she reasoned. "I am glad that Edith—child of so many sorrows—has his faithful breast to lean upon. Ah! why was I created a woman, with a woman's heart and a woman's clinging love?"

Anew her wild passion rushed over her, like the mighty tempest which it was, engulfing reason and every truthful perception of the future in its mad and strong waves.

"With Ashley," she thought, "I can be happy; without him, wretched. Can I see him the husband of another—of Kate Sommers? Never! I can be strong for any trial, for any consequence my course may bring. My relation to Mr. Ashley shall not be changed. If I find him cold and negligent, I will draw him by the strongest cords of my own great affection. If unkind, I will forgive. If exacting, I will cure the fault by forbearance and constant effort to please."

Ah, Annie, loved for thy virtues, honored for thy youthful wisdom, what blind folly hast thou woven in these new-made vows, which must chafe thy young life, till the silver cord shall be loosened and the bowl broken at the fount.

CHAPTER XIII.

*What is man's love? his vows are broke
While yet his parting kiss is warm;
But woman's love all change will brook,
Or like the ivy round the oak
Cling closer in the storm.*

THREE more years had hurried in their ceaseless flight. Annie Wilmot was again in the parlor of the Fletchers; Annie Wilmot still, whose hope and love could see the sunshine through the darkest clouds. In these years she had been favored with frequent opportunities for the exercise of her forgiving patience and forbearance toward Mr. Ashley. If she had wearied at times none knew it. Edith, finding that sarcasm and remonstrance were alike unavailing, endured more quietly the evil she could not turn aside.

"Do you not think that Charlie's growth in beauty keeps pace with his increase in days and stature?" asked Wallace Fletcher, directing Annie's attention to his frizzle haired boy, trotting in baby steps over the soft velvety carpet.

"Beautiful things are noticed without being particularized or pointed out," interrupted a handsome stranger, with a bronzed skin and slightly foreign look. His features were attractive, though marked by no prominent peculiarity; their expression a mingling of determination and mildness, while his dark, piercing eye was like Edith's. He was her brother, from beyond the sea.

"A genuine Yankee brother," continued the stranger, "seeking to draw from others acknowledgments of a wonderful genius or quality, which in your direct line is yet to astonish the world. When Miss Wilmot has seen the golden locks of Germany, the jet black ringlets of Spain and Italy, falling in wilful disorder over the fresh young face of the sweetest little blonde, or the darker hued brunette, whose eyes can flash back the meridian rays of Sol; while the feet and limbs, unfettered by American trappings, keep merriest time with the birdlike notes of the gushing voice; then, and not till then, can she judge of the beautiful."

"Indeed!" replied the young mother, smiling, "it is not meet thus to apostatize from your own household and become the expounder of foreign beauty; the radical worshippers of raven locks, ere long to be lifted by American zephyrs, while the unfettered limbs grind away at a rickety organ. Picture your worshiped ideal, the ill-dressed, olive brown beggar of a penny, which alone can save from positive starvation."

"Starvation in the old countries follows the steps of the poor from the cradle. Regarding the gaunt spectre as a reliable companion, he does not seem as to you the *ultimatum* of all horrors. Begging is a regular trade. No designer or machinist in Yankeeedom ever strove harder for perfection in his art than does the beggar of Italy. Woe be to that foreign traveller, who with pockets lined and unsteeled heart, approaches the outskirts of Naples. The first sound that greets his ear beneath that sunny sky is the wail of wretchedness, while the smallest service rendered the stranger by those ignorant people, is always accompanied by the most exorbitant demand for money."

"Yet you do not seem displeased with the lot which casts you in the midst of this people, in everything so unlike America."

"I sought that more salubrious climate in pursuit of life and comfort. The object attained, what think you I care for the peculiar habits of a priest-ridden people? One soon forgets to wonder at these common things. Nature is there, attired in her holiday

garb of beauty and wealth. Art also has there reared her pedestal, her giant statue, with one chiseled hand grasping the present the rounded figure turns to the past. Back, back, spanning the centuries that have flown, she finds her unsurpassed workmanship. Relics of old grandeur, still struggle with the crumbling hand of time. Ah, Edith, would that you could look on those reminders of the mouldy past; touch and handle the figures, once beautiful and admired, stand in the shade of the lofty pyramid, and think for what purpose it was pointed upward. A feeling of awe creeps over us as we consider the hoary age that wraps them in so much interest. They exist, monuments of other ages, but where is he who fashioned them? Shall our words and deeds, shall our influence live on, when all but the immortal mingles with the dust of earth?"

"Will your enthusiasm extend to the volcano of Italy; could you dwell on its splendor with equal ardor; could you climb its fertile slopes with no thought of the frowning summit? No fear of that voice which uttered the terrible doom of Pompeii and Herculaneum?"

"Italy has not all the volcanic mountains. You have more than one-third of all in the known world on this side of the pond, and we fear them when in Italy as much as the terrible Vesuvius and *Ætna*.

"It is nearly eighteen hundred years since Pompeii was overwhelmed, and, though we have had no bow of promise on which to base our trust, we may hope the shadow of omnipotence rests on those terrible craters, and their molten fire rolls back at His merciful word."

"That is only conjecture; it may be hope against hope," replied Edith. "Who doubts that the people of those ancient cities felt the same security on the eve of their living burial. The sunny skies of Italy have a cloud darker than the longest, dreariest night whose icy gloom fetters the far northern pole."

"As if the whole of Italy slept on the bosom of a volcano. On

the contrary, the danger, if such there be, is confined to localities. Rome is up the coast from the places you have mentioned. You will, therefore, be comforted, as its remoteness must secure it against the lava anger of Vesuvius."

"In Italy's proud capital, ancient mistress of land and sea, you may be exempt from those dangers which threaten other localities, holden back by a spider's web. But how can you shun the moral Upas, spreading within the circle of Rome's seven hills its deadliest breath of ignorance and crime?"

"I see," replied Edgar, "if one bugbear is reasoned into non-existence, your ready wits find no difficulty in creating another of equal evil, and to be dreaded in the same degree. If you and Miss Wilmot will visit that land of antiquities, I think you will find less to fear and more to admire. Their roads, constructed before the Christian era, thirty-one, leading from different parts of Italy and all centering in Rome—the numerous aqueducts so firmly constructed that many of them remain to-day, the wonder of every tourist. No sky so clear, no water so blue, no landscape so enchanting."

"Yet," answered his sister, "beneath those sunny skies no man's head was safe an hour. They lived in constant dread of the fate that overtook the steersman of Xerxes' boat, knighted and crowned in the morning and hanged in the evening of the same day. This was Rome—a land of heathenism."

"Too fast, sister mine; not a land of heathenism. Her lost arts refute that. Then remember her statesmen, her orators and architects. A veneration creeps over one as he walks her streets and remembers those very pebbles might have echoed the foot-fall of a Sallust, the historian; Cicero, the greatest Roman orator. As one stands in the shadow of those grey old ruins, centuries are spanned, and the present can reach back and clasp hands with Rome in its pride and glory, its learning, its philosophy and genius."

"I see," replied Annie, "you are becoming quite a Roman, en-

raptured with all her former glory—the relics that reveal a perfection of art which has endured for centuries and now challenges the world to reproduce it. But is there no moment when you recall its early cruelty and shame? When Nero lighted his garden by the faggots that blazed around his helpless victims? To me past horrors would circle Rome with a canopy of blood.”

“Certainly, Miss Wilmot, and in these days nothing can remind one more forcibly of the past than the ruins of the Coliseum, standing on the spot once occupied by the reservoir of Nero. The ruins are in sufficient keeping to show that it was one of the most magnificent structures ever planned. It was in the arena of this grand edifice that hundreds—I may say thousands—of Christians and innocent men were thrown to savage beasts with no weapon of defense, and often partially bound, and this for the amusement of a bloodthirsty Roman audience. But if other nations, with absolute power, have not done as cruelly, they have fallen but a few points behind. Even we, a New England people, can never wipe from our skirts the blood stains of a Salem witchcraft.”

“I admit that is a plague-spot never to be eradicated. But to drop all the horrors of the past, both at home and abroad, to me my own land is best, and around it must ever cling my first, my strongest, love.”

Edgar had become too much interested in Annie to just like this outspoken opinion.

“Yet,” he ventured to say, “you would like to see the fatherland, breathe its health-giving air and sit under its spreading vine. Could you not be happy on foreign shores, where you would be appreciated, your judgment respected, your home guarded with the jealous care of love and an earnest friend?”

A new thought, a revelation, came to Annie’s suspicious heart, and the slight flush on her cheek grew to a crimson hue. With equal quickness she pictured the convulsive wrinkles in the face

of Mr. Ashley at the first word of friendship from the handsome young stranger.

"Even then," replied Annie, "with all so foreign to my early habits, so far from the land I love, mine might be a life of homesick wretchedness."

"Loyalty," remarked Wallace, "and love of country is ingrafted in the nature of every true woman. Nor is our Annie an exception. She is not to be tempted by dulcet strains of music from ivy-grown ruins, nor yet by the unrivalled beauty of the setting sun kissing with its last sleepy rays gilded domes and lofty pinnacles. We approve her choice, but hope our gentle one will shun the volcano at home and, remembering the fate of the elder Pliny, venture not too near the deadly crater."

Annie understood the words of Mr. Fletcher to express his dislike to her union with Mr. Ashley, an event he had always doubted. Her heart acknowledged his wisdom, yet faltered not in its chosen way, trusting in the ability of a good wife to influence, yea, recreate, the false and erring husband.

Edgar Gregg had no cause to feel the first numbing stroke of disappointment. He had, without a previous intention, betrayed his secret wish, not knowing Annie's engagement to Mr. Ashley. At a later date he apologized for his hasty act and turned his mind to other matters, without expecting the sun to hide in darkness, or the moon fringe her silvery rays in sackcloth, because one fair face had been turned from him to a less worthy but more fortunate man.

Late on the evening to which we have referred, Annie returned to Mrs. Barlow's, in whose house she had found a home through the weary years of her laborious life.

Accompanied by the husband of Edith, she approached the house without attracting the attention of a gentleman and lady who were standing near the door conversing in a low, earnest tone.

The gentleman was first to discover her proximity, and, without

speaking, turned in an opposite direction, while the lady, with averted face, entered the house.

"Who were those fugitives?" asked Wallace, taking the trembling hand that rested on his arm.

"I do not know," replied Annie, and without waiting for another word passed in at the street door, hoping to see the suspected girl ere she had left the hall.

"It must have been Kate Sommers. No other girl could vanish so quickly," she mused, as she found herself standing alone.

Her conjectures were soon confirmed by the entrance of Mrs. Barlow, who, reading her questioning face, said:

"Yes, Annie, it was Kate Sommers. She has been out with Mr. Ashley, whose love I always thought insufficient for one. What can it be worth divided between two? God save my more than sister from the wretchedness of misplaced affection."

"Enough," thought Annie, as she abruptly left Mrs. Barlow, and went to her chamber. "Must I be pitied and thought a silly witless girl, who, as a matter of course, will fast and mourn for one who has drawn towards me the notice of a whole community. I have shed my last tear for Mr. Ashley, and this matter shall be fixed so that he shall be at liberty to marry Kate Sommers if he desire." Locking her door she went on in a calmer mood: "Alone! and none can intrude on the blessed solitude of to-night. I must think—think dispassionately of all the past, whose unkindness and neglect I had hoped to bury in oblivion, and win, by patient effort, the whole heart of Mr. Ashley. But can the leopard change his spots? His present conduct distresses me. What will it do by and by? I do not wonder that his former wife welcomed the King of Terrors.

"Yes," she said, after a long silence, "it must be done." Then rising she gathered the few trinkets Ashley had given her during the long years of their acquaintance. Opening a small locket, she gazed sadly on the picture it contained, then placed it with the

other articles, and wrapped them all in an envelope, with the intention of returning them to their former owner.

The next day found Annie languid and faltering in step, yet firm in purpose. As its early hours dragged on, the presence of Kate reminding her forcibly of the previous evening, her decision wavered and she tried in vain to bring to light a sufficient excuse for the singular conduct of her lover.

If she had malice towards the offending girl, it yielded to a better feeling when she saw her pale with grief at the unexpected intelligence of her father's death. From the crest of life's dancing wave Kate was plunged to the depths of sorrow.

"Poor girl," thought the relenting Annie, as she saw her depart for her distant home. "I may have blamed her too much. She has no memory of a mother's hand smoothing her soft hair or resting gently on her child head. Who can guess into what I might have developed if a mother had not guided my first tender years?"

With such reflection she blindfolded both her powers of discernment and anger, and with an unasked-for pardon on her lips waited a coming interview with Mr. Ashley, who, she believed, in the absence of Kate, would redeem his thoughtless improprieties by a consistent behavior, if not by a devoted affection.

CHAPTER XIV.

*While injuries can be inflicted, or
Insults be offer'd; yea, while rights are worth
Maintaining, freedom keeping, or life having,
So long the sword shall shine; so long shall war
Continue, and the need of war remain.*

—BAILEY'S TESTUS.

*'Take back your cold, insane and carping mind
Into the world you came from and belong to.*

—MRS. OSGOOD.

THE summer waned, and the fall of 1860, memorable for its political contest, faded with its cooler breath the young flower and herb, as if to admonish a nation of the withering strife which would shoot from a Southern sky to the bosom of happy homes, till sorrow should gird with her sable mantle our great and fair Republic.

Mr. Ashley had never known that his miniature and other tokens in Annie's keeping had been collected by her own hand, with the intention of their speedy transfer to his possession. The act had been omitted, but the wrapper enclosing the articles remained unbroken.

Without apology Mr. Ashley was permitted to continue his visits to Annie at Mrs. Barlow's, in whose parlor kind Mr. Sanford spent many pleasant evenings.

The night following the presidential election, with a mind ill at ease, Mr. Ashley sought the presence of Annie, where he was doomed to a yet further vexation, by an encounter with the happy face of Mr. Sanford.

"Well, Annie," said that gentleman, seating himself carelessly by her side, "Abraham Lincoln is to be our next president."

"You are always the bearer of good tidings," answered Annie, her face speaking the pleasure she felt. "I am not usually affected with political news, for I have no correct understanding of tariffs and revenues. But I know when despotism would silence an untrammelled press, and seal forever the voice of free speech by its stealthy, ruffian blows, even in the Senate chamber of our land. I know that liberty and the pursuit of happiness are guarantees which should not be denied to any of God's children."

"Women and ministers"—retorted Ashley—"talking politics, with all the endowments of tongue and acquired lore. Let me tell you your confession of ignorance in political and state matters should be also made by the multitude, who would put a low-born railsplitter in the presidential chair. They will tremble in dismay when they find it will take four hundred thousand bayonets to accomplish their object. A Southern chivalry, spirited and brave, will never be trampled to submission by a plebeian superiority of numbers."

"Ah," thought Annie, as these words told plainly of a sympathy with a Southern principle, another point of discord, "can we harmonize in nothing?"

The calm Mr. Sanford answered in tones slightly agitated:

"You can hardly believe your own words, but if it has come to this, my dear sir, if a portion of our people would on account of this late victory at the polls, rebel against a Constitution which has linked us to them and their human bondage, through the half century of successes, the sooner four hundred thousand bayonets are called to service the better. But remember, the day they wage a civil war, the first unhealing wound is inflicted on the monster

they cherish. The echo of their first gun shall be the knell to slavery, shall rouse from the Northland a hardy and educated people, and from the West the loyal sons of her flowering prairies, reaching far to the shores of the Pacific. They may be slow to anger, slow to close in deadly struggle, but your spirited chivalry shall find an undaunted foe, when they meet these marshaled hosts of freedom. We know that slavery and free labor cannot long exist on the same soil, but is our Goddess of Liberty to be strangled by the clashing chains of cruelty? Nay. If the slaveholder would retain through the present generation his colored chattel—let him beware.”

“You would make this to be only a farce or perhaps sudden panic. But I tell you the Southron knows his own powers. Drilled from the nursery to the use of arms, one would slay a thousand of your Northern novices, and five put to flight ten thousand of the Western Goliaths you have described. Where are your army and navy, where your munitions of war? You doubt a contest; but, sir, if Abraham Lincoln does not resign and suffer a different man to go in before him, the historian must write in letters of blood, scenes more sickening than cluster around the name of Robespierre, or darkened with crimson gore the streets of Paris during the French revolution. Mr. Sanford, we are both contending for a right form of government,” and Mr. Ashley’s voice softened a little, as he glanced towards the pale face of Annie. “You believe in one way, I in another. If you please, let us remember the words of to-night a single twelvemonth, then judge which is in truth the prophet.”

“We will do so,” replied Mr. Sanford, rising to leave the room, “but God grant that a constitutionally elected president may never in weak cowardice succumb to a threatening minority. Anarchy would be the certain result, and the government which has been our boast would be wrecked in the act. The people who have declared the successor of the present Chief Magistrate are able to support their decision, and they will. As yet I apprehend

only volleys of words, while your quick ear is listening to the click of the musket and roar of cannon. I trust the sounds of war will come no nearer, but we must wait and see."

Closing the door, Mr. Sanford's step echoed along the hall as he sought the more retired rooms of his sister. He did not wish to place great importance on the excited words of Mr. Ashley, yet he could not dismiss them. "Where are your army and navy?" seemed hissed in his ears by exulting demons and pressed in unwelcome force to his troubled heart.

Not only Mr. Sanford, but others, saw in the Southern sky the cloud no bigger than a man's hand; they heard its mutterings and the growl of its displeasure. But it was a squally region, tornadoes springing to life and sweeping headlong till the fitful passion was exhausted. This might lull, like its predecessors. So a great nation closed its eyes, and would not see.

Months passed, and as the boom of the cannon died in Charleston harbor, Mr. Ashley, as he was wont, sought the home of the Barlows. He was ushered into the parlor, where were seated Annie, Mr. Sanford and his sister. This was no unusual scene, but never before had jealousy whispered that these little gatherings might in some way interfere with his present or future plans. He shrugged his shoulders and his brow contracted as he glanced in the direction of Mr. Sanford, and thought:

"Older than Annie, but what is a disparity of years where there is unity of thought? Both are hated Puritans; both love the nigger and honor the soldiers, and with bared heads, stand beneath the red, white and blue, which to me is but a floating rag. Does he think to marry her?—the dough-faced Yankee mudsill. It shall not be, never. Why have I not seen this before? 'Tis nothing to him whether our opinions harmonize or clash, and by all the powers of earth and air, before another month a link shall be forged that neither he or his detestable sister can break. To-night shall settle it and the wedding day be named. And

Annie—well, she shall then find if her haughty pride will not bend, it shall break.”

Here the piping voice of the newsboy called the attention from all other subjects: “Lewiston Journal! Extra! Tells all about the great battle. The North defeated; the South victorious.”

Mr. Sanford was the first to speak. “Through the Red Sea, and not around it, must the American people go. Must wait beneath the furnace blast the pangs of transformation.”

“Nations, as well as men,” replied Ashley, “must command respect. These many years, by acts of aggression, by twisting the Constitution, by interference, by denying rights that have been handed down for generations, the North has trampled on the South, and now if the red billows of war and devastation sweep on to the door of every hamlet, they will be wise to accept it as retribution, justice, and make the best possible terms with an insulted, but no longer enduring chivalry.”

Frequently had these men discussed the struggle now sweeping the land, and Mr. Sanford knew full well that words with Mr. Ashley would be as pearls cast in the teeth of an adversary, and silently withdrew, followed by his sister.

There was a silence hushed and weird, as Annie Wilmot, smarting from past experience, roused by the words of to-night, looked calmly in the face of Mr. Ashley. At length she spoke:

“You would have us think the terrible devastation and horrors of this war should be traced to the culpable injustice and errors of the North. Let me ask, Who sought the repeal of the Missouri Compromise? Who, by murder and stuffing the ballot box, and forming a bogus constitution, would have forced slavery into Kansas? Who precipitated the Mexican war, and for what? Who sought the assassination of a legally elected President? Who fired on the starving garrison at Sumter, after having stolen from the North all munitions of war? Did the North do all this and much more?”

With little apparent heed of her words, Mr. Ashley moved

his chair to her side, and in a very pleasing voice for him remarked:

"Your nature is too gentle and sensitive to dwell on our national disturbances and mix in the general *mêlée* of to-day. I am sorry to think you are so much troubled about what you cannot change."

"And what am I to think of you, throwing your influence and sympathy with those who would destroy our Constitution, with its guaranteed liberty to all men, and trample our glorious old flag in the dust?"

"Understand, my dear, that woman shines brightest in the home, where she must ever live, the sweet controlling centre. There, in her quiet loveliness, she looks well to the ways of her household, and in return her husband shall rise up and call her blessed."

A look of surprise gave place to one of scorn, as Annie replied:

"As I have no household to look after, no husband to pronounce a benediction, I may be excused for being careful about many things. First and last shall my every thought be given to my country in the present contest and awful strife with slavery and its inseparable inhumanity and shame."

Mr. Ashley came to see the present was no opportune moment to urge a speedy marriage, and as he prepared to leave would have placed a kiss on the pale brow of the girl before him, but the dark, flashing eye was hardly encouraging. So he contented himself by taking the cold hand, and saying:

"Darling, I will see you again at an early day," and the door closed behind him.

"A simple subterfuge of gauze," thought the astonished Annie. "Does he think I cannot see through it? We quarrel at every meeting, nor are these disagreements children's play. A brilliant forecast for a happy matrimonial life."

That night hers was a thorny pillow. Every word of Mr. Ashley, as he had sought to vindicate a course so distasteful to

herself and friends, was recalled as poisonous arrows in the breast of a helpless bird. Then came the still small voice: "If this is in the green tree, what will be in the dry? If he would control me now, what will he do when I have promised before God and man to love and obey?"

After the events just recorded it was days before Mr. Ashley attained his equilibrium. On the whole he felt he had waged a losing game, and reflection told him it would be no easy matter to get the consent of Annie to a speedy marriage, since she had always fixed such an event, if at all, in the most distant future.

Further discussion might be impracticable, but he would keep an eye on Mr. Sanford, and if his suspicions proved well founded, he would shoot him as a dog; yes, the dirty puppy he was. So the months passed, and a kind of truce existed between Annie and her lover, which at times promised an entire cessation of hostilities. But as victory after victory perched on the Southern banners, Mr. Ashley became arrogant and forgot his enforced caution, no longer hiding the haughty disposition of his nature. After a battle in which the Union loss had been severe, he approached Annie with his old-time taunts and sarcasm.

"More brave fighting of your smart Yankees. No wonder you believe in the equality of the sexes. Any old woman could successfully compete for the honors of war with the generals you Northerners send to the front."

There was no love light in the eye of Annie Wilmot as with uncertain voice she replied:

"Such words are unworthy of manhood, especially one who lives under the protection of our glorious old flag."

"To thunder with your old flag and its protection, which is less than a lady's sunshade against the wildest tempest of autumn," replied the enraged Ashley, forgetting all restraint. "And understand that no right minded woman would belittle herself and soil her garments by taking a stand in political muddles."

There was a visible tremor in the voice that Annie tried in vain to control as she answered:

"A woman can think, can form an opinion, and has the privilege of expressing that opinion—a right I intend to use at pleasure without regard to any representative of your Southern chivalry. The end of this struggle is not yet. Nor is defeat to be branded as cowardice. True courage consists in rising superior to misfortune and bravely snatching the conqueror's crown. In this struggle woman will do what she can for the country she loves. Go where her presence is needed, minister to the wounded and dying, and no hardship shall drive her from her post."

"A few more victories," replied Ashley, "will teach her that her post is in the home; that without her aid the South can settle this difficulty, and settle it forever."

"Settled," replied Annie. "A question is never settled till it is settled right. I know on the blackest crime is founded the disturbing elements that for nearly half a century have been fomenting the present quarrel, and the whole American people have suffered themselves to be drawn into the shameful vortex, and not until slavery shall be stamped from our escutcheon shall we be a united and happy people."

"Then we'll fight on, for the trumpet of Gabriel can never blot or blast it from our banners."

At this point anger in the young girl's breast gave place to astonishment, and she answered more quietly:

"If I am not a Christian, I believe in a God of justice, who can hold the nations in his hand and will not let the wrongdoer always flourish as the green bay tree."

"That sounds well," retorted the thoroughly angered Ashley, "'tis bad enough to listen to a man who mingles his canting Methodism with the nigger politics of to-day. Talk of a God of justice. If there had been such an One, this whole abolition tribe would have been swept from the face of the earth before they inaugurated this fratricidal war. But their hour has come."

"Mr. Ashley," Annie said, with no longer a trace of anger, and her calm eyes resting on his face, "the time with us has come. From this moment let the hopes and the promises of the past become a dead letter, and all that has ever existed between us be annulled, while we forget that we have ever known each other. Now go; act according to the dictates of your own conscience. But tread cautiously in the path of an Arnold, lightly in the steps of Aaron Burr, lest your name be linked with theirs on the historic page, and your brow crowned with a coronet of treason and a nation's undying curse." Rising as she ceased speaking, she left the room. Ashley, who seemed already resting under the condign punishment of Lot's wife, gazed silently at the door through which she had passed.

"Ah!" thought he, "I did not think it would come to this. But she loves me—she is a woman and will relent, and the break in the chain can be mended with a few soft words."

He did not long wait the return of Miss Wilmot, who, with trembling hand placed on the table before him a small package containing all of worth he had ever committed to her care.

"I shall not take those things," he said, with more than usual tenderness. "I was wrong, Annie. We have long been friends. Shall a light word part us now?"

"Not lightly do I consider the language of to-night. But that is not all. Long ago my better judgment told me there was a lack of mutual feeling between us. That if I became your wife my heart must go out in vain for sympathy—weep in withering bitterness for one tithe of the fond affection I had given. I loved you, and reason was blind. I thought I could endure all uncomplainingly—though I failed to win you from error, failed to make myself the centre to which your heart must turn from other objects and other loves. A thought will convince you with what forgiving silence I met unkindness and neglect. You, emboldened by what might be taken as a want of spirit, have dared speak derisively of that pure religion, whose benign and

lifegiving rays have shone on the feudal darkness of paganism—scattering error and superstition by the unwavering light of its revealed truth. Hardly as a lesser sin can I see the exultant spirit with which you recount the weakness of the North—you would see our fair domain, bequeathed in blood, given to a usurpation more shameful a thousand times than our fathers fought, when they sowed in hunger and cold that we might reap a harvest of universal liberty. Personal injustice I can bury where eye can never see, but sins like these, against God and humanity—never.”

“Annie, you are hasty. Your tears do not agree with your excited words.”

“You have in the past regarded tears as a womanly weakness, quite inexpressive. Learn, Mr. Ashley, a woman can be strong—can abide by a wisely made decision, regardless of any emotion that may linger in the heart.”

Cold pride and dignity returned to the face of Mr. Ashley, and silently he rose to leave.

“Will you take the things you once gave me, or shall I send them to the office?”

One look into the sad, determined face settled the question, and Mr. Ashley took the small package from her hand and went forth into the night, regretting not his words, only that he had spoken too soon—ere Annie was bound to him by cords not to be broken by her simple word.

When Annie was left alone she felt the long struggle was ended. Right had conquered, and her throbbing heart should ere long return to the quiet of girlhood. Weeks passed, but she grew pale and apparently unable to endure the dull routine of her everyday toil. She had become habitually silent and reserved. None knew the ordeal through which she was passing. Even Mrs. Fletcher attributed her anxiety to the disturbed state of our national affairs, in which she had taken a lively and patriotic interest. Disaster met our arms. The husband, for the

higher duty of a country's call, left the obligations of home. The mother, the sister and the bride, gave their dearest one "For truth, for Heaven's, for freedom's sake." "Alas, that I have none to give," remarked Annie, as she spent an evening with Edith, during the temporary absence of Mr. Fletcher. "Neither father nor brother; Ned, dear child, is too frail and young."

"Yes, Annie," replied her friend, "but why not push Mr. Ashley to the front? In the midst of true men he might do some worthy deed; who knows?"

"You speak lightly of very serious things."

"Excuse anything in my words that has a sound of levity. But, tell me, how can two so much at variance in heart, life and character, love and be happy? How listen to words you call treason, and keep at peace with him, who hopes for the downfall of a government you love, and the triumph of principles you particularly hate—aristocracy and caste?"

"I was never pugilistic. You know I have a standing quarrel with the Shermans; would you have me more generally involved?" The last words were faintly spoken, and Edith noticed her drooping lids and very pale cheek.

"You are ill," she said, stepping from the room to procure a cordial.

"Only a slight indisposition," answered Annie, trying to smile and arouse yet once more from her exhausting weakness.

"You are wearied by labor, worn out by close and hurried application. You must stay with me and allow yourself rest, both of body and mind. Forget this terrible war."

"Forget! How can I forget?"

All that night Annie tossed on her bed, unable to sleep, and the morning light found in her case all the premonitory symptoms of fever.

The kind physician, as he stood by her bed, became to her the person of Mr. Ashley.

"You think," she said, making an effort to rise, "because I

am a woman, suffering will make me humble and repentant. You show a misapprehension of my nature. I would not, if I could, recall those words. Go! go! I will not see you. I will not think——” then, waving her hand for him to leave her, she sank slowly back on the pillow.

Disease struggled many days for that young life, as a new trophy for the insatiate King. But the danger passed and health came slowly back.

Annie left her darkened chambers, and once more attended to the varied duties of life. In the mingled strength of her pride and will, none but Edith Fletcher thought it was not the Annie of other days.

CHAPTER XV.

*We see not, know not; all our way
Is night——*

—WHITTIER.

"IMPOSSIBLE, father," were words pronounced with emphasis by Fred Allen, whom we left during his second collegiate year. "The frank, open face of Ned Wilmot couldn't veil so much evil. Remember his fidelity in all things, small as well as more important transactions."

"I thought," replied Mr. Allen, a little nettled, "the boy was honest and I trusted him as my own son. But I was duped by the young knave, who excelled in deceit, instead of uprightness. If he can throw light on the dark changes brought against him, well and good; if not, he must suffer the consequences of his folly."

"But, sir, you cannot think of making a public matter of this affair. Such harshness would ruin the young boy. Think of his poor mother and noble sister. Have they not suffered enough by the Shermans without this last crushing blow?"

"You need not lay this to the Shermans, who, by accident, have been drawn into the perplexing difficulty. It may be a heavy trouble to the parents, but it comes from their own spoiled child. They may consider his faults trifling, but cannot expect such lax judgment from others."

"Annie came in the stage, which passed a few minutes ago."

"I am sorry, for I have no wish to see her pale face and dark, searching eye. Yet I shall not hide the guilty, even for her. To the penitent we may show mercy. But Eddie Wilmot stoutly denies all knowledge of the theft, plainly traced to his hand. Should he be suffered to go on, growing hard in sin, or should justice in her stern majesty bid him stop and think in his lawless course?"

"You do not know that the boy is guilty. Wise action may vindicate him entirely."

"I will not condemn him unheard. Yet more, he shall have the benefit of counsel; unless you decline the little job."

"My father taught me long ago not to shirk the open espousal of a cause I believed to be just; or withhold my services when needed to sustain the unfortunate, or to encourage the fallen."

"I am glad Ned has so good a champion; but, boy, do you know the circumstances which compel me to think so harshly of one, who, till recently, was a favorite with us all?"

"I will give a synopsis as I understand the affair: You, it seems, have something of a mania for unique and curious coins. A friend acquainted with the peculiarity offered for exchange a Mexican piece, valued at twenty dollars, for which you gave him American gold. The newly acquired treasure was deposited in the common money drawer, awaiting your leisure for further inspection. A few hours after, as you sought your late deposit, you found only our national currency. Eddie Wilmot was the only one who had passed behind your counter. It was not strange that something like suspicion fastened on your young clerk. Questioning him, indirectly, you found the same guileless face and honest expression which for years had been winning your entire confidence. Confused and doubting, you kept your own counsel, but looked more carefully to the money. On the third day a small sum was missing; the discovery, of course, added to your former perplexity. While seeking to settle, in your own mind, the mystery, the elder

Sherman, contrary to the habits of his previous life, walked into your store, and having purchased various articles, gave in payment the Mexican money, whose departure had given you so much trouble.

"'How came you by this?' was the first impulsive question, as the shining metal rested in your palm.

"'Well, that young clark uv yourn swopped with our Bill, and tuk paper,' was the astounding reply.

"'Where is Bill?' you questioned.

"'Oh, he was going home, and as so much money in one lot was sort ov unhandy like fur him, I tuk it and gin him smaller change. Why, what on't? You look kinder thunder-struck, as though you'd never seed no money afore.'

"'Ned,' you remarked, 'changed this for paper?'

"'Yes, and then went straight to the bank.'

"'To the bank?'

"'Sartin, sir, sartin! And I guess the road is knowed putty well by this time, too. He has got two or three hundred dollars there, and I happened to see the last twenty-five put in only t'other day. S'posed you knowed all about it.'

"These, sir, are the circumstances as I have heard them, which are to darken the life and ruin the character of young Wilmot. It all comes from the Shermans—the most bitter enemies the family ever knew."

As Fred ceased speaking, the elder Allen sat silent and thoughtful, but there was no relaxing of the stern resolve. At length, with some assurance, he said:

"The boy admits the bank account, which is a sufficient proof of his guilt. Where could he get money to deposit, if he did not take it from my drawer? If he can tell, I shall be as glad as any one?"

Fred shook his head, wondering what strange phenomenon was shading the heart of his parent, usually so replete with charity and love.

"Well, Cap'en," and the lank, repulsive figure of William Sherman stood before the Allens. "It seems that ar clark of yourn has stole the march on ye, and got in ahead arter all. S'pose you know how he's managed to git his money out of the bank, and then has tuk leg bail? Shouldn't wonder if it was quite a spell afore you set eyes on him agin, anyhow."

"Have you no hounds to send in pursuit?" asked Fred Allen, while a gleam of satisfaction stole over his manly face.

He waited for a reply, but no answer came to his question, and going from the store, with a sad heart he walked towards the humble, but comfortable, home of the Wilmots.

"There, Cap'en," commenced the tongue-loosened Sherman, "if that boy of yourn don't beat all nater. Obstinate as a mule. S'posed he'd look ahead fur enough to see that as much of the stole money was hisen as yourn. Mebby he keeps a kind of sneaking notion arter that gal yet. But who'd think ov a gentleman like him going to the factory for a wife. Likely he thinks folks will kinder fergit; but I tell you how 'tis, 'twill take a strong nor'wester to blow the cotton off that critter. Only think, she's been packed in it nigh on to a dozen year, er thereabout."

An uncontrollable restlessness seized the right foot of Mr. Allen, but a second thought told him the absurdity of kicking a neighbor from his store at his time of life; so he calmed himself by hasty strides across the floor, and saying:

"Annie is a good girl—good enough for any man; but that does not influence Fred. He always scouted circumstantial evidence; cherished faith in those around him, and pitied their faults."

"You should have larned him better than to be so chicken hearted, if you 'spected him to be a man. I just took my George in hand when he was a boy, and told him to keep away from that crew, and pressed my words with a good, stiff birch. Yes, sir, I had it out with him 'fore he was out of petticoats. The old

woman sniveled some, but I told her to dry up, er she'd get the same sass. That's the way to do it."

Anger and contempt were too plainly pictured on the face of Mr. Allen to be mistaken by the discomfited Sherman, who sought the street in time to see Fred Allen rapidly nearing the Wilmot home.

"Fool," he muttered, "helped that boy off, like as not. Wish he'd lost five times as much, by the great horned spoon!"

Following at a safe distance, he saw him enter the house and the closing door shut from his hardened eye the misery within.

All day long had the grief-stricken parents pondered over a little note—last legacy of a missing son, with a grief so profound that even Annie's unexpected arrival could not light its bitter gloom.

First came a simple good-by to those he was stealthily leaving. "Forgive me," he continued, "not for theft, for, before heaven, I am innocent; but for the seeming disrespect and unkindness of going without your approval. Mother, Mr. Allen is inexorable; he is resolved on a public trial. With such an array of circumstances against me where is the man whose purse and influence shall save me from yonder jail?—from the damp of whose polluting stains I could never come forth. But this great injustice shall not drive me to the whirl of reckless dissipation and ruin. I will remember your words of wisdom, your eye of gentle love. I will remember Mr. Allen. Ofttimes has he bidden me to look calmly on the most adverse circumstances—wait patiently till the storm should pass. I treasured his sayings as the words of a seer, not thinking they were to fortify me against his own breath turned to the blasting wind.

"My little investment has been discovered and placed to my discredit. But it is all my own—the little savings of years. Cent by cent I have hoarded every gift, Fourth of July and Christmas donations, many of them from Mr. Allen's own hand,

anticipating the surprise my little fortune should one day create. It was a pleasant dream, but the awakening, how terrible.

"The two hundreds I have saved for you with miserly prudence they would take from me and call it justice. But, nay! it is now beyond the reach of Mr. Allen, far on the road to Lewiston, directed to Annie, in care of Wallace Fletcher. That is yours—the little to which I would gladly add ten times as much.

"Annie, my poor, dear sister! What will she say, what think?"

"You will help me," exclaimed the almost frantic sister, as she placed the tear-stained note in the hand of young Allen. "You never refused a favor—now that my necessities are so great, you cannot. Eddie must come back, but, oh! where shall I go to find him?"

"I would lend my aid," replied Fred, after a careful perusal of the letter, "but, Annie, it must not be. My father's edict is as mysterious as harsh. I cannot change it. The Shermans are mixed up in the affair, if not at the bottom of the plot. They will let no chance slip of doing you harm. Edward must not be sought. It will end well, I am sure of it. Patiently trust in Him who can bring good out of evil."

"Fred," answered Annie, stifling her sobs, "supposing circumstances should be reversed a trifle, and William Sherman should rob you of home, reputation, and social standing, then, still dissatisfied, steal from your heart its remaining idol, as he has stolen mine. Would you remain calm, wait and trust it would prove only a little joke, ending pleasantly as an eastern story, or the last sunny page of a wild romance?"

For a moment young Allen looked sadly in the face of the wretched girl, then, in soothing tones, remarked: "Though I see the injustice of the whole affair, I can take a more hopeful view of it than your distracted mind will allow. I believe all these things have a purpose, though it may be many suns ere we can trace and understand. We see through a glass darkly. But

can you not hope and try to see what may be the end—the grand total of the result?”

“That is just what I can and am looking at—the result; grand total as you please to term it. A wretched and ruined boy, perhaps breathing his young life away in haunts of crime, far away from gentle words and loving friends. 'Tis so terrible, and need not have been, and to think you accept it as a providential matter, brought about through the instrumentality of William Sherman. Where—where shall I go to find him?” and Annie’s sobs were bitter and uncontrollable.

“In other days,” remarked young Allen, turning pleasantly to Mrs. Wilmot, “the name of Sherman brought to a white heat the usually quiet temper of our Annie. I see it has lost none of its peculiar power. Reflection will convince her that Eddie would not be safe at home, within the reach of his enemy and yours. Time will clear up what now seems mysterious. I see no better way than to wait its developments.”

“You are right,” replied Mrs. Wilmot, “but it is so hard to wait for what I would know to-night. As your father has befriended us in every past trial his present course seems very strange. This theft is probably the completion of a plan which has been a long time in maturing. It has been kept in the dark, but I hope it will some time be so fairly unmasked that your father shall see that my poor boy has not done a wrong or sinful act.”

Then followed the story of the bright half-dollar.

“Ah! fatal mistake of mine!” sobbed Annie, as her mother finished the narration, “to bid him silently replace it instead of going either to your father or mine.”

“Strange!” replied Fred, “very strange! But there is a coming morrow, whose light shall chase away all mist and darkness. Till then, wait in the fulness of hope and expectation.”

Late that evening young Allen returned to his home. His father sat in his comfortable chair, but his look was restless and

uneasy. He received his boy with an ungracious silence, quite foreign to his genial nature and lifelong habits.

The mood seemed contagious, and Fred sat, awkward and strange, in the presence of his father.

"Bed-time," ventured the elder gentleman as he looked at the little mantel clock, and without further ceremony retired.

Morn brought to his face the old look and pleasant smile, but it was many days ere he spoke the name of Wilmot, or said aught of the Shermans, either good or bad.

CHAPTER XVI.

*'Canst thou declare the laws of nature, and observe
The varied fields of science, ever new,
Opening, and wider opening to the view?'*

"FOUR weeks, four long and awful weeks since Eddie left us," spoke, or rather groaned, Annie Wilmot, as Fred Allen stood by her side, and, with one hand resting on her head, looked pityingly down to her pale, haggard face. "Not a word, not even a breath or a shadow, by which to trace his course; nor yet a single circumstance throwing light on those events which sent him from Holman in disgrace. I fear he is already dead. If he is not, what is there in a wandering life to prevent him from becoming a worthless, ruined boy?"

"He left you under aggravated circumstances, but he took with him the safeguard of early influences, which he promised to remember. He will do it. The hour may be far in the future, yet I am sure he will come back to you stronger and better for present sufferings."

"You will please not talk to me in that way. It brings neither comfort nor life," she replied, shaking her hand as a token for the withdrawal of the hand that still rested on it and was becoming disagreeably heavy, with the repetitions of opinions she disliked as cold and wrong.

"Annie," he said, taking a seat by her side, "you are passing through trials which we think might have been avoided. Deeply

as I regret your sufferings and their cause, my judgment must be based on facts; not impulsive feelings. If Edward was my brother, instead of yours, my decision would be the same, though my sympathies and affection might be stronger. If time and money could be well spent in seeking and bringing back the boy, I would start to-night. But Edward has chosen the right course. His prompt action and the letter he has left for you manifests a wisdom beyond his years. Much as I desire to help you in this sad hour, I must not let my sympathies overrule my better judgment."

This talk might have gone on indefinitely, Annie choking the rebellious tears, while Fred vainly sought to say some word to sooth her anguished spirit.

Suddenly the street door was unceremoniously opened, and a tall muscular figure stood in their midst. His clothing showed wear and tear, especially tear. His unkept hair straggled from the confines of a battered hat, while his flushed and dusty face bore marks of blood and some contact with the rough things of life.

"I want to see Squire Allen," were his first loud words.

"Be seated," remarked Fred, "and I will hear your wishes."

"Well, sir," went on the newcomer, "I've got a job for you," and looking at his torn clothes—"just you see here how I've been punched and thumped. Ain't that what you call salt and batter?"

"Indeed," replied Fred, "you have a dilapidated look. On the road to ruin, if better fortune does not interfere."

"And now I want you to 'rest that sneaking, thieving, lying, old Sherman. He's what's done this."

"I hope you are not at odds with Mr. Sherman."

"Well, I guess so, and I'll tell you how it is. You see I had an awful nice turkey. Awful nice that gobbler. This morning he broke jail and got into the road. Just then Sherman came along in his old cart. You know turkeys are not so very spry to run. Not seeing any one round, he yanked his old hoss, so as to knock that poor bird down and kill him, and 'fore I could get

thar—yes, 'fore it had got done flopping, he had got him in the back end of his old cart and was hauling some bean sacks over him. In course I called him some pet names, and he said back, but that didn't hurt—till he drew back and hit my nose. Then we clinched; and when I got done with him, he looked like a Lucyve had clum' him, and used all its nails and teeth. Folks came round like bumblebees, and when I heard them talk of officers, I grabbed my gobbler and run. Now you see I set an amazing store by that bird. 'Twas born just the hour with my little Jim and they grewed up together almost like twins; so you see there'll be some damage, beside the salt and batter."

"Who had the last blow?" asked Fred, trying to suppress a smile that resolutely danced in his blue eye.

"No matter 'bout that; he hit first, and what's the dif'rence if I got the last clip? I guess we both got a dum threshing, anyway," and one sunburnt hand went instinctively to his swollen nose and eye.

"Well," remarked Fred, "it looks as if Greek met Greek, and it ended in something like a draw game. Don't you think so?"

"No, Cap'en, I don't think any such thing. He ain't more'n half licked anyway. I left the job for you to finish, and 'spect it done up brown."

"Ah!" replied Fred, "don't you see I should be no match for the athletic Sherman. I might fare hard as your bird."

"But I didn't mean that. You can 'rest him."

"No doubt he could be arrested. But think a moment. You have got the turkey, and guess have given him a fair punishment. Rather than kindle more bitter feelings, and spend a mint of money, why not drop the affair—have a nice turkey dinner and invite friend Sherman to the feast?"

A look of astonishment was just visible through the grim of his blood spattered face as he answered: "Shan't do any such thing, but mebbly I'll go hum and get some clean clothes. You're a funny lawyer, though. Thought they hung round for chances.

Guess you'd better been a parson," and with this parting speech, left to go in pursuit of the needed change of raiment.

"Very nearly right," remarked Annie as the visitor closed the door; "you would need but one text, 'Love your enemies and do, hoping for nothing in return.'"

"No better starting points," replied the young jurist; "yet I prefer the law, and you say one can never succeed where there is no adaptability, no previous choice."

"Do you think," continued Annie, "you possess all the cardinal points a fond mother once urged in behalf of her only son, whom she was pushing to the front as a ~~law~~ student."

"I fail to recall the incident."

"There were three traits of character that she deemed essential, and represented her son as proficient in all. First, would steal like a fox. Next, was the *sassiest* imp who ever lived, and lastly—no one since Ananias could lie as he would."

Fred shrugged his shoulder as he laughingly said: "No, Annie, I have not practised long enough to excel on all these points. But you know a good student learns something every day."

"Yes, but to a nature like yours"—and Annie really smiled at the thought—"either proposition would be impossible."

"A lecture at the hall," continued Fred abruptly, wishing if possible to draw the mind from the one great subject on which every thought centered.

"The subject?" asked Annie with indifference.

"At the close of last evening's lecture, he promised to touch on phrenology, physiology and mesmerism," answered Fred.

"Too many eggs for one basket. He must have great ability for condensing ideas to even touch them all intelligently."

"I have tickets for the evening. Will you go and hear for yourself?"

"Thank you, Fred, I shall not feel I am losing much, if I do not hear the three subjects you have mentioned, crowded into

the talk of an hour or even a single evening. Beside, I have no wish to go from home."

"The very reason why you should go to public places. The talk, whether good or foolish, will probably call out quite an audience, and from the whole we may extract something new and useful."

"Nothing new under the sun," repeated Annie, "and who would go there to find the unknown?" A look from her mother, who wished to see her rally from the morbid state to which she was drifting, decided the question, and Annie was soon ready for the walk.

"We are early, and can select such seats as we wish," remarked Fred, as they entered the small, but neat and comfortable hall. At the appointed hour the professor appeared, ready to harangue the waiting people of Holman.

In a synopsis of his previous lecture he gave a brief history of phrenology, informing his audience that it was founded about the year seventeen hundred and fifty-eight, by Francis J. Gall, native of a small village in Germany. Tracing its gradual spread and growth, he called up the names of Spurzheim and Combe, as having done much for its cultivation and advancement. Next, he treated it as an established science; traced its influence on other branches, its tendency to direct the attention of the medical man to the functions of the brain, its effect on legislation, theology, etc., all proving it to be the most important discovery of modern times. Having explained and dismissed these different topics, the lecturer expressed his readiness to make one or two professional examinations, allowing himself to be blindfolded, that his eyes might not in any way assist in forming the opinion he was to offer, touching the propensities, sentiments, and morals combined to make up the character of individuals.

After a whispered consultation, William Sherman was chosen from the audience, and seated before the blinded professor. As he placed his hand on the head of his unknown subject, a look of

disappointment was plainly seen around his tightly closed lips, while Mr. Sherman, in his conceited folly, waited impatiently for some expression that should assist him in establishing his royal superiority in the minds of his doubting neighbors.

Slowly the hands of the professor moved over the different organs. "Secretiveness large," he began, touching a second time that conspicuous organ. "Acquisitiveness very large, with conscientiousness exceeding small. Such a development will allow the getting of money under any pretense, and the keeping of every farthing once obtained, without a thought of honor or justice. As combativeness is only average and caution quite large, he would not make a good soldier."

At this point Mr. Sherman had a slight appreciation of something wrong, and twisting uneasily in his chair, awaited more comprehensive language.

"Veneration is small," continued the speaker, "self-esteem large, benevolence small, with large firmness, leading to a mule-like obstinacy. All the animal propensities are largely developed."

This was enough for Mr. Sherman, and springing to his feet, he said: "Mule, did you call me? Mule? Guess if I was, there'd be a kind of prancing here you didn't advertise for," then turning angrily away he strode from the platform. "Mule," he again muttered, "but"—and his anger seemed slowly abating—"mebby he knows a leetle, 'cause he said I could get muney—but perhaps sumbuddy told him afore he cum."

The professor, thus left in the middle of a half-told story, looked gravely around the audience, who, with suppressed laughter, awaited further developments of science. As there were no others who cared to take the test of his phrenological examination, the lecturer passed to the brief consideration of his remaining topics.

"According to Webster," he said, "physiology is the doctrine of vital phenomena. The science which treats of the properties of organized bodies, both animal and vegetable. We cannot, in

this brief time, take up the lower animals, their wonderful make-up and mystery of life, differing somewhat from those higher in the scale of existence, and much less the vegetable world—the subject is too far-reaching for a common lecture to common people. But we will take physiology and anatomy, according to the general acceptance, as confined to the house we live in—treating of this tabernacle and its indwelling life, together with the laws by which life may be sustained and prolonged.

“Its study in the past has been too much confined to the medical profession instead of being simplified so that its first principles may be understood by the lisping child and become one of the first duties introduced into our common schools. So great has been the neglect on this point, few know, or care to know, the situation of the heart or its functions. They know there are veins, but do they know there are arteries, or the work allotted to each?

“They hear the faculty tell of the stomach, but have no appreciation of its nature beyond a cavity, a rubber bound vacuum of sufficient elasticity to suit the most voracious appetite. Physiology would teach us the folly, yea, the sin, of this ignorance—that through the laws of the circulatory system the blood is conveyed to all parts of the body once in four minutes. It teaches the functions of the lungs in restoring the half-spoiled blood; of the millions of pores, and numberless multitude of nerves through whose agency all sensation is conveyed to the brain.

“To keep the machinery of this wonderful structure in healthy working order—to sustain the unknown principle which we call life—there are laws to be understood and followed.

“Physiology teaches the necessity of cleanliness in preventing the minute perspiratory organs from becoming clogged and useless—the demand of the lungs for pure air to aid in their constant work—the nutriment required and the danger attending all excesses in food, drink, overexertion and sloth.”

After a few more commonplace remarks touching the bones and

muscles, saliva, gastric juice and bile, the expounder of modern science became troubled, either for want of strength of body or material with which to proceed. Gaining time to think by sipping from a glass of pure water, and looking with an expression of surprise at his watch, he flourished gracefully a white handkerchief and proceeded in newly-gained strength and liberty:

"I have scarce given you a glimpse of this curious and wonderful house, yet the hour admonishes me to close. Last night I intended this as my last lecture. Through the importunity of friends and my own dislike of crowding too many important things into a single evening, I have made arrangements for staying with you one more night.

"To-morrow evening, at this place, I shall speak at length of physiology, and take up my remaining topic of mesmerism—a science discovered by Mesmer, a physician of Vienna, in 1776. This science, you will observe, is still in its infancy. If its achievements at this stage are so great, so entirely beyond comprehension, what may we expect when research and investigation shall bring to light its hidden branches and array them methodically for the instruction of the masses?

"I have with me a young man from Wisconsin—Mr. Stokes. As a subject, he is beyond compare. When in the mesmeric sleep he will visit distant lands, find absent friends, expose theft, etc. To-night I will give you a single test, and only one, as the hour is late. Stolen property is my choice, if any have been so unfortunate as to lose in that way."

At this announcement a perceptible thrill swept through the audience. Even Annie, who scorned aught of necromancy or mysticism, trembled violently as she grasped the arm of Fred and whispered: "If he only could. Oh, if he only could!"

"This gentleman," said the lecturer, as Mr. Stokes, by invitation, came forward, "has very small development of time and tune; in fact, he cannot tell one tune from another. Yet see the effect of a touch."

As the magician's fingers passed slowly over the deficient organs Mr. Stokes moved to the front of the platform. A second touch, and, in a deep, clear voice, he sang one of the popular songs of the day.

"Now for a single test," said the professor, again looking at his watch.

A moment's silence and a clear voice asked:

"Have I lost property? If so, what?"

This was Fred Allen's father, and a listening silence followed, as all were familiar with the unpleasant incidents connected with the hasty departure of Edward Wilmot.

"Money," was at length plainly spoken by Mr. Stokes.

"What kind and how much?"

There was another pause while Mr. Stokes seemed examining with great care some fancied article which he turned in his hand and changed repeatedly from one to the other.

William Sherman, who had a seat directly behind Annie, grew impatient at the inconsistency of his neighbor, which irritability found expression in low tones, yet sufficiently loud to be distinctly heard in the prevailing stillness:

"Who'd think a man like Mr. Allen, with such an awful sight er religion as he pertends, would be seen running arter that ar Cloven Foot right here 'fore everybody. Next thing he'll call on that witch of Abner the minister told on t'other Sunday. I swow if such things don't beat me. That critter don't know nothing. L'arned his lesson 'forehand and been hired to come here and tell it, like's not."

"I see gold and silver," replied Mr. Stokes, addressing himself to the lecturer, through whom all questions were asked. "Many of our own old coins, but only one piece of gold—large and heavy, and bearing a strange device."

With this announcement every hearer seemed electrified, and the excitement increased with the next question of Mr. Allen:

"Was there more than one person interested in the abstraction of these coins?"

"More than one."

"Can you describe them, or tell me where to look for them to-night?"

"There was a boy—with straight, light hair, fair skin and grey eyes—who went towards the west. I see him now, sitting by the side of a woman who looks anxiously in his pale face while he counts many dollars in bank bills. A young girl is weeping behind his chair.

"There were others—one a man, tall and bony."

Here Mr. Stokes paused, raised his right hand, and with his forefinger pointed from one to another through the audience, till it reached William Sherman, when it stopped.

This act was accepted as an invitation for all eyes to note carefully the uncomfortable look and appearance of the person thus indicated.

"He told you 'twas a boy," said the excited Sherman, "and is p'inting to his sister that he 'spects knowed all about it."

"The boy is your nephew, Bill, and you are the one suspected of complicity," retorted a near neighbor, "and the man is right. You dare not deny it."

"A lie, and you'll just have to prove that," replied the accused party, laying violent hands on his old hat and taking rapid steps towards the door.

"Sherman—old Bill—thief!" echoed from different parts of the hall, which, mingling with a few hisses, were sufficient to terminate for that evening the wonders of Mesmerism, as exhibited by the professor and Mr. Stokes.

"What do you think of the evening's entertainment?" asked Fred, as he walked home with Annie.

"I cannot say that I was not entertained, for I was indeed very much amused to see with what economy your lecturer tried to eke out his little knowledge, making it spend well by telling all that

he knew in a way that seemed to say that he had advanced only a few ideas—the principles of questions which he had thoughtfully investigated and with whose different attributes and qualities he was thoroughly conversant.”

“Don’t you think he guessed the character of old Bill pretty well?”

“Yes, very well, but his lecture displayed only a superficial knowledge, most of which might have been gained from an old phrenological almanac.

“In physiology he was even more deficient, stating only a few things, known to every one before. If he knew, why did he not explain how or by what means the blood is forced through the circulatory system, in what way it is purified, and how the various elements required to promote and build up the different parts—say bone, muscle, etc.—are taken, each to their respective place. And, again, he might have told us the number of corpuscles in a drop of blood, whether the red or white predominated. No doubt in a common lecture to a common people he would have said they were all red. He did not even refer to the wonderful mechanism of the eye or the complicated organs of hearing, though the house we live in is supplied with both. Why couldn’t he have told us of these less commonly understood things, and what he knew of them?”

“Possibly he did. I would not challenge the depth of his perceptions.”

“No doubt from his storehouse of knowledge he gave us the lion’s share, and wisely refrained from exposition of the fluids. Then there is the spleen—but as wise M. D’s. have failed to tell us the exact part it plays in the human organism, silence on that point was wisdom.

“There were those present who might have listened patiently to an explanation of the constituent parts of this wonderful house, the relation of its chemical and other substances with the old earth

itself, their similarity and connection with each other. The field is broad and varied."

"Oh, Annie, wait and breathe, while I find my place. There is logic in your ideas, but new to me, as I have never heard or even thought, there might be union or connection between the living, active man and the earth matter of this globe."

"Indeed! And what is the material part of man but matter? soon to be clasped in a long embrace within the breast of its waiting mother. Then why not be a close alliance between the two?"

"This question can wait," replied the thoughtful Fred, after a moment's silence. "Now let your judgment be passed on mesmerism."

"I know very little about it. I have never thought it a fable—or myth may be the word, rather an undeveloped science, that might, in the future, be of service to the race. But its hidden mysteries can never shine in convincing strength through such an educator as we have heard to-night."

"I wish," replied Fred, laughingly, "women lecturers and critics were more popular. You would excel them altogether and be the one among ten thousand."

"One could never succeed outside the space of her given abilities. I have no capacity for public speaking. But I know a score of girls, toiling from early morn till fading day—in a cotton mill, who know more and could lecture better than the man we have heard to-night; yet custom forbids them to occupy the more public and lucrative position for which they are well fitted."

"Annie, your position is one of usefulness. You are loved and respected, and as a woman, shielded from many of the harder things the stronger man must meet, yet you are not satisfied. Do you think if the masses of our women were fitted for the more active and responsible duties of life, any weak law of usage would have power to hold them back?"

"Satisfied," quickly echoed the earnest voice of Annie. "Sat-

isfied; not while a higher wish is ungratified, or a better end to be attained by effort. Ne'er speak to me of the weak law of common usage. Few dare, even for what they believe to be right, step over its prescribed limits. In all the past it has given to woman a subordinate place and they have accepted it because its influence is far-reaching, its word law. To the daughter of republican America, custom has taught a foolish inactivity and reliance. To her it has closed her college doors and hedged within certain limits the progressive and aspiring woman. I tell you, Fred, it is not incapacity—it is custom, whose present laws must, ere long, yield to a more righteous code, which will point such men as we have listened to to-night to the shop or the farm—for which the athletic frame was originally intended."

As Annie ceased speaking they had reached the door of her home, and, with a simple "good-night," Fred turned away, thankful that for a single hour he had been able to divert the mind of his young friend from the great sorrow which wrapped her so closely in the dark folds of its deep, unfathomable mystery.

CHAPTER XVII.

*'And yet he thinks—ha, ha, he thinks
I am the servant of his wish;
Nor dare to meet him in his home
Another's lord. Well, let him think,
I'll shape my way in pride and will;
And show that woman can be strong.*

"THREE hundred thousand more."

Ah! who can forget the sickening thrill, the hopes and fears, the yearnings for a single glance beyond the present, as a nation heard the voice of its chief, sounding from State to State, from town to town, "three hundred thousand more."

Holman had its war meetings and public demonstrations. In the excitement of obtaining by enlistment the quota or required number of twenty men, the anxious citizens failed to attach any importance to the absence of the Shermans from their enthusiastic gatherings.

When the recruits were snug in camp, and the dictating, fault-finding Sherman was seen plodding noiselessly about his farm, his slouched hat hiding his eyes, his lips closed and quiet, suspicion became at once alert and vigilant.

The entire absence of the son was the first discovery. Then came whispers of a heavy forgery, by which he had relieved his father's coffers of several thousands. Having accomplished the ruin of his parent the son had departed without leaving any

definite clue to his intended future, though none doubted his hasty journey in the direction of a neighboring recruiting office under whose banner he might secure present safety.

Misfortune does not often tire with a single blow, or weary with the first unwelcome visit.

From the hour of his first disaster the vaunting William Sherman became the victim of many calamities, till his remaining funds slid away by pecuniary mismanagement and loss.

Harry Wilmot pitied and forgave when he saw his enemy shrink hopelessly from the reward of his evil ways, though no repentant sigh sought to balance a life of oft repeated crime.

Annie had left Lewiston with the hope of regaining lost strength in her country home and its tranquillizing air. At the close of a few weeks, without having heard from her missing brother, she returned to her former residence, more wretched than when she left its smoky air and crowded streets.

"I thought," she said, as she sat with Mrs. Fletcher two days after her return, "that I saw Kate Sommers yesterday as I passed the Bodwell residence. It must have been an optical illusion, though it appeared so real."

"Not an illusion, dear."

"Was it Kate?"

"Doubtless it was the same Kate we once knew and feared."

"How came she there with such a home-like look?"

"I would not tell you, Annie, but you must find it out some time. Kate Sommers is married. That pretty house is her home, bought with money left her from her father's estate. I am told that she allowed the writings to be done in her husband's name, a step which I consider very unwise."

Annie was sensible of a quick, almost suffocating pain, yet there was no expression of astonishment. She only asked:

"When was she married?"

"Why not ask who her husband is? I shall tell you; it is Mr. Ashley, my long esteemed cousin. He has got a wife this time

who will be his equal in many things. She will not probably become broken hearted on his account. Did you know of the engagement?"

"I did not. Nor do I know when they were married."

"Only a few days since. They give a reception this week. The invitations were sent yesterday."

"Are you among the friends?"

"Kate never regarded me with peculiar favor. I do not expect her notice now."

"Yet neither of you have been forgotten by your old acquaintance," interrupted Mr. Fletcher, as he took from his side pocket two little billets directed in the delicate handwriting of Kate.

"Mrs. Ashley will receive her friends Wednesday, the twenty-fifth, eight p. m. I did not think Kate would carry her jesting so far. Neither of them expect us to notice these by attending the reception," remarked Edith, still holding the note.

"Yet I am disposed to accept it as a matter of fact, and present myself at the appointed place and hour. Why not?" asked Annie.

"You strange girl. You cannot think soberly of such a thing."

"Not only soberly, but with a fixed decision. Do you think, with Mr. Ashley, I dare not behold a scene in his domestic life, that I cannot see him the husband of another? It may be unpleasant at first, but the sooner I familiarize myself to these new facts the sooner shall I forget that Ashley was ever more to me than a passing friend."

"Brave, my noble girl," said Mr. Fletcher, "and I will provide the necessary outfit. My pretty wife shall have a white satin, and Annie the palest shade of blue."

"Your preliminaries are easily disposed of," answered the wife. "I never glory in obstinate contention. The promised paraphernalia, though my judgment teaches a different course, may

buy my consent to join my husband and friend on the auspicious Wednesday, and see the result of their folly."

Preparations for the coming event were entered upon and completed without great expectations from the ladies. Wallace only waited impatiently for the events of the coming evening.

"You look young and fair as on your wedding day," remarked Annie, as she twisted a few small flowers with the glossy curls of Mrs. Fletcher's hair, the finishing touch before starting for the Bodwell place, now the home of Mrs. Ashley, and where the first reception was to be given.

The house was well filled with invited guests before the arrival of Mr. Fletcher and party.

"You must be more than a woman," said Edith, as Annie looked after some slight disarrangement of her toilet with unusual care. "I could not look indifferent, or appear happy in the teeth of so many aggravating things."

"No, Edith, dear, I am only a woman, but I have realized that fact and its attending circumstances from a schoolgirl."

"What has that to do with the present? I have known as much, yet we are wholly different in the practical things of life. You stand erect and look the world squarely in the face as if challenging a combat, and, with a stoic's unconcern, shake hands with all its unpleasant situations as with welcome guest. I am intimidated at the sound of its strife, shrink from its turmoil, and never feel happy when beyond the shadow of some protecting spirit."

"You, without questioning, accept the present condition and place of woman. I foresaw the impossibility of becoming a queen or even a mere subordinate favorite of fortune. I had desires reaching beyond the common drudgery of life. I asked something above the shrinking dependence to which many so quietly subscribe. These feelings were right. I felt them to be so, and my impetuous will made a strong resolve to leave the beaten path. In a measure I have been successful, though failing

to move in the higher enterprises of life. The avenues to them were blocked. But I have learned self-dependence, even in the darkest and most perplexing hours."

"Then it is the hard knocks which are to make woman man's equal?"

"Not his inferior with all her chains of folly. But education should bring out the stronger qualities that now lie in disrepute. Indolence may point to the goal, but activity and effort must span the dividing gulf."

This conversation did not in any way dispel the wonder from the mind of Mrs. Fletcher at the perfect composure of Annie, as, leaning on the arm of Wallace, she stood before her former lover and his new-made wife.

For once in a lifetime Ashley's face was lighted by a quiet smile, and his restless eyes seemed satisfied, till Mr. Fletcher and Annie entered the parlor. His surprise was too sudden for concealment. The old frown came again, darker and deeper, as he looked questioningly into the face of his wife.

Passing with her friends to the recess of a window Annie said in a low voice:

"The same Kate who played auctioneer with my homemade hat and the gipsy fortune-teller with her numerous friends."

"It is evident," replied Wallace, "our appearing was a surprise to Mr. Ashley. I am satisfied and ready to leave at any time you please."

"I came by invitation, and will go when I can civilly remain no longer."

Here the conversation was interrupted by the approach of other parties.

Annie knew that curious eyes were turned towards her. Hiding that knowledge, and mastering all timidity, she moved through the apartments, conversing with more ease and freedom than she usually commanded in the presence of strangers, unless aroused by the most irritating circumstances.

As the hours passed on and many friends gathered around his former love, Mr. Ashley became more unhappy and disagreeable. Even Kate's saucy smile faded as she noticed the attention Annie was receiving from Ralph Frazier—a man of ample fortune, but who had no gentle wife in his princely home—no mother for his only child.

The old clock from an opposite tower told the noon of night, but Annie heeded not its warning strokes.

"Wallace bids me say the carriage is ready," whispered Edith, as two rang slowly out on the morning air.

"A little more effort and this miserable farce will be ended," thought the tired girl as she retired from the parlor, followed by Ashley, who stopped in the hall to await her reappearing.

"Where is Annie?" asked Wallace, as his wife placed her hand on his arm.

"Only a moment late—is here even now," she answered as Annie descended the stairs.

"Annie, may I see you to the carriage?" asked Mr. Ashley, standing very near her and speaking in low tones.

"Excuse me, but I have kept Mr. Frazier waiting till this late hour for the small favor you ask," then, taking the arm of the waiting Frazier, she bowed her last adieu to Mr. Ashley.

Could the boisterous waves of old ocean have risen between them, or lengths of hill and dale formed a separating distance, regret and mortification might have become seared and dead. But as they pursued their former occupations frequent meetings were unavoidable, and memory and thought lived on, yet from that hour neither spoke nor ventured one recognizing look.

Later in the season, when the wintry cold had frozen the still uncovered ground, Annie dispatched a hurried dinner that she might gain time for a walk to the post-office ere the exacting dong of the bell called her to the task she had long and patiently performed. Every day she hastened on her unrequiting errand, impelled by the desire and hope of hearing from her absent brother,

An unusual rattling over the hard pavement caused her to turn an inquiring glance towards the wide and open street.

The first object of interest was a child, with long, sunny curls falling over soft ermine, holding in his small gloved hand a bunch of flowers, taken from its house of changeless summer, to test the atmosphere of December.

Unconscious of approaching danger, the boy child gazed on his fragrant flowers, as the tender leaves shriveled in the cold blast, while down the street, directly towards him, dashed a frightened horse attached to a heavily loaded cart. Personal suffering and danger were instantly forgotten by the frail girl as she saw the imminent peril of the young botanist.

Drawing her crimson shawl from her shoulders, she swung it above her head as she sprang forward to the rescue of the unknown child.

Less daring pedestrians looked on in terror, while many eyes were shaded, that they might not witness the closing scene.

Annie saw but one object, realized the existence of no beings save herself and the child, nor did she even know that she was hazarding her own life to save that of another.

Another step forward and the blinding shawl floated again from the hand of the dauntless girl, and, carried forward by the breeze, rested for one brief second before the eyes of the infuriated animal. He could not stop, but the new fright turned him a little from his direct course, checked his precipitate speed till Annie had grasped the strange boy, and strong arms in turn had reached out to save them both from imminent peril.

"Ralph Frazier!" muttered Ashley, who had been an eye-witness from a protected nook on the opposite side of the street, "and now he will marry her, low born though she is, because she has happened to rescue his worthless idol and return him to his bosom unharmed. Ha, ha!" he continued, with a low chuckle, "she knew the brat, was willing to stake her life, and has won. Silver and gold will be her recompense. She will live in costly splendor,

eclipsing both friend and foe. Why did not I save the child? I was nearer and might have done it. But why dwell on what might have been. Better think of the future, which I will have my own way. The day this hated war shall end I will sell or give away my effects in this frozen region and go again to my sunny South. I'll never play the satellite around that Yankee planet—not I."

Ashley went home in a rage, fretted by the envious belief that his former betrothed would, ere long, wed the millionaire.

Ralph Frazier sat in the library of his mansion. One hand rested on the soft curls of his boy, with the other he penned a note to Miss Wilmot, in which he enclosed a thousand-dollar check as a slight acknowledgment of her brave act, which had saved undimmed the one light of his desolate home.

"Shall I keep it?" asked Annie, as she placed her open note before Mrs. Fletcher.

"Why not?"

"Why accept a reward for doing my duty? The act was impulsive rather than brave. Had time been given me for thought I might have won a different meed."

"The real character shows itself in times of emergency. Had yours been based on selfishness—like the valiant Ashley—you would have sought the sheltering arch of some friendly door instead of throwing yourself in the very path of a maddened beast."

"You over-rate the thing, Edith. It was the deed of a single minute, costing no previous struggle, yet the whole town is aroused in view of my great courage and self-forgetfulness.

"True courage is not the impulsive act of the present moment; it is gained by many conflicts. If one can look forward and see the ills of life like 'Alps on Alps arise' yet go calmly on to meet the terrible, we may safely conclude that he is brave and courageous."

"What a queer girl, endowed with sensitiveness and a class of

feelings of which the rest of us heedless mortals know nothing at all. Notwithstanding your great unworthiness you will accept this check on some condition, either as a reward for endangering your own life, or as a gift which wealth can well afford to lay at your feet."

"I know I should feel better. A thousand dollars, added to what we now have, would make quite a fortune for people of simple lives and habits. I once hoped that Eddie would become a useful and prosperous man. As things now are, should my parents live to be old and dependent, my puny arm alone must shut the door of poverty. I alone would stand between them and starvation or charity; the latter being the more hideous monster of the two."

"How can you speak so, Annie? Charity is not always cold and selfish, nor will you ever depend on it for bread. Heaven is just."

"Stranger things are of daily occurrence. Heaven may be just, yet I become a beggar."

CHAPTER XVIII.

*Lay the gem upon my bosom, 'tis not long he can be there;
See how to my heart he nestles—'tis the pearl I love to wear;
If in after years beside thee sits another in my chair—
Though her voice be sweeter music, and her face than mine more
fair;
If a cherub call thee father, far more beautiful than this,
Love my first-born! oh, my husband! turn not from the mother-
less.
Tell him sometimes of his mother—let him not forget my name;
Shield him from the winds of sorrow—if he errs, oh, gently
blame!*

"I FEAR," remarked Annie, on one of her frequent visits to Mrs. Fletcher, "that I fail to place a just value on your love and friendship. The privileges of your house are so free, I cannot know their worth."

"Your presence more than compensates for the favors you receive. I could ill afford to spare you, my husband is so frequently absent."

"You are looking weary, or, it may be, ill," suggested Annie.

"More dull than ill, I think. But Wallace's business affairs call him away so much I have nothing to do but nurse all unpleasant feelings and coax them to wild proportions."

A slight cough fell on Annie's ear like the low boom of a distant minute-gun—the first premonitory note of approaching danger.

"Shall I remain with you till the return of Mr. Fletcher?"

"It would be pleasant, if it would not trouble you."

"It will be a pleasure to serve you in any way. When your husband gets back I shall remind him of his error in leaving you so much alone. These men, crazed by politics, or the desire for gain, quite forget that frail ones at home, fenced in by wind and weather, need aught but an ample purse to insure their happiness."

"A whole week ere Wallace will return," thought Annie, as the light of another day struggled through the closed blinds.

She had spent a night of restless anxiety, listening to the short breathing of her friend, and the half-drawn sigh of her fevered sleep.

When the morning came and she rested more quietly, the troubled girl stole from her side—first looked carefully for any disturbing cause, then, leaning a moment over the unconscious lady, drew the clothes closely about her and retired from the apartment, understanding something of Edith's danger, if not its full extent.

She thought of the jealous care with which the husband had watched his frail idol. Yet he had failed to see the peril, wrongly interpreted her increasing gentleness, the brighter flash of her eye and deeper crimson of her cheek.

With scarce a hope of permanent good, John, the man of all work, was called from his beat to convey a note to Dr. Wilton, who, on previous occasions had been the medical adviser of Edith and other members of her family.

Obedying the summons, he arrived at the home of Mrs. Fletcher before she had left her chamber.

"You think your friend is very ill?" he said, after listening to the unpleasant symptoms described.

"I fear she is. But, doctor, we have taken the trouble so soon, I hope you will find in her case nothing positively alarming."

"A decision without seeing the patient would be unjust. But,

my dear lady, be not too sanguine in your hopes that we have only an embryo difficulty to meet. Years ago, when a beautiful child and the acclaimed queen of her juvenile friends, seeds of the fatal disease existed and she suffered from their gradual growth ere you learned to love and admire her gentleness. Their final detour for a season what must, ere long, terminate her frail development is indefinite. At best we may only hope to con-
currence."

The friends of Mrs. Fletcher were not long allowed the comfort of uncertainty and hope. The disease, which had flattered by its deceitful quiet, gained strength from every effort to stay its onward strides.

"If we may keep her through these winter months," said Dr. Wilton, as the husband grasped his hand imploringly.

Wallace felt there was sympathy in his voice, yet little to hope from his words.

Anxiously he sought other advice, till he had exhausted every earthly means of relief.

Annie's watchful eye anticipated every want, and the husband soothed the invalid with his gentle tenderness. Yet she grew weaker and her slight form more attenuated.

"These bleak winds," sighed Edith, as the first breath of March screamed through the leafless trees. "They sound cold and mournful. I would hear again the song of the red-breast and see the earth in her rich, beautiful green."

"Springtime is at hand," replied the husband. "These winds are but the last angry threats of old Winter. Warm gales will soon return your favorite robin and restore to forest and vale their summer beauty."

"Yes, Wallace, but I shall not see them.

"Wallace," she again said, after a short pause, during which her eyes rested pityingly on her husband, "you are not deceived, neither am I. Then why blindly hope against evidence and fact? I may be spared you a few days, but soon must go to that land

whence no traveller returns. Even now the mists of the dark river are gathering around me."

"Does my Edith fear to die?"

"Oh, no! on my own account I have no dread of the last enemy. No, for I have felt that I should not meet him alone. 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil.' But this beautiful world has held me by strong ties. At first it was very hard to think of leaving all the pleasant things I had called my own. Hardest of all, the separation from my Charlie—our own darling boy. Even now there are moments when I think it must not be. Times when I would live for his sake. Nor can I see that another may be raised up who will do as well, and to whom he would willingly listen."

"I know," replied the husband, "the loss of a mother is irreplaceable. But I have a father's love, and will spare no effort in the education and moral culture of our child."

"I have not thought you could do otherwise. It is the little hard things that trouble me. Things too slight to attract your notice. The loveless word may turn his affectionate heart to a thorny wilderness—his home to a desert."

"I understand you, my dear, though you are too delicate to say it, yet you have feared that some time in the future there might be another in this place, when the claims of your Charlie would be overlooked."

"That is it. You are kind to speak that what I could not. I would not pain you, but how can I shut out the unpleasant picture while I can think of so many little sad faces wandering about uncared for and unloved?"

"The thought is neither strange nor wrong. But listen to me a moment, then you must rest; you have already said too much."

"From this saddest of hours I will personally look after the wants of this little one. I will remember your words, and be on the alert for any unkindness aimed at him. He shall not be dis-

placed in my affections, never crowded from the bosom in which you rest him. Can you trust me, dearest?"

"Oh, yes," she said, as a sweet, satisfied look stole over her face. "Give him my watch. Save a braid of my long hair, and when he is older, tell him it was his own mamma's. Only one thing more, then I will rest. My clothing will be of little use to you, and do Annie so much good. It will fit her without alteration."

"It shall be as you wish, Edith, all, all."

Then the husband laid the weary one back on the pillow, and, with one white hand resting in his, he sat by her side till she slept—so quietly he could not believe disease was fast hurrying the last strokes of its fatal work.

"You will forgive the Shermans," whispered the dying woman, a few days later, as Annie stood weeping by her side.

Annie had never wished to forgive the Shermans, nor had she regarded the act as a duty. The reference was unexpected, and Edith's question remained unanswered.

"You have been injured, my Annie, irreparably, yet you will not hate them so bitterly. You will forgive, even as you wish to be——"

Her words were choked by a violent fit of coughing, so exhausting that all believed the spirit had broken its fetters and soared to its eternal home of uncreated light. But again the bosom heaved lightly and the eyes were slowly opened.

"Yes, yes," sobbed the weeping Annie, as she knelt by the bed, "I will try to forgive the Shermans."

"I knew that you would. Like yourself, my kind, generous friend."

Yet one wish seemed unexpressed as she looked inquiringly towards her child.

"He is asleep, darling. Would you see him?"

"Yet once more place him by my side."

The unconscious child was taken from the sofa and laid tenderly by his mother.

On one chubby hand she left her last kiss, as she whispered:

"Good-by; may we meet where parting is not and tears are wiped away by the hand of God."

Then, looking the farewells she could no longer speak,

"'Mid the dying rays of the setting sun,"

she passed from earth to commence an eternal day of rest.

Ah, Death! does it never weep over its own ruthless work—darkened homes, desolate hearts and orphaned ones?

Three days later folds of satin—gift of her husband for a festive eve—rested around the form of Edith Fletcher in her narrow casket, while flowers, whose native tints stole in unfading beauty through their transparent covering, were woven with the rich knots of her own luxuriant hair. When the last rites of love were ended, the wife and mother was carried from her home to return no more to the hearts she had gladdened with her love.

For many days Wallace Fletcher refused to leave his room. But the prattle of his boy and words of many friends prevailed and drew him from his seclusion to mingle again with the bustling world.

Annie took the vacant place in the household but not in the heart of the husband.

For the sake of those around her, and especially the little one, yet too young to know his loss, she sought to wear a smiling face. But hers was a living heart, whose deep well of affection was, as Thackeray says, "like the lithographer's stone, what was once written upon it could never be rubbed out." Only the still hours and the Eye that never sleeps were cognizant of her bitter anguish.

Weeks after Edith had rested from earthly care, on a night of unusual storm and tempest, the overwrought nerves of the loving girl assumed an ascendancy beyond her control, and, leaving her bed, she went, not to the darkened tomb, but to the couch of the motherless child, that she might weep there.

Like a panorama the past flitted before her. She saw again the faltering step of the invalid; every look, every movement of the lost one passed rapidly before her agonized vision. The silent room, within whose curtained walls the last farewell was breathed on that dreadful, dreadful night. She knew not why, but here the voice of the tempest seemed to lull its fury and whisper in Edith's soothing voice—

"There is no night there."

Annie stretched out her hand to clasp what seemed so real.

"Edith, Edith!" she said, "no sorrow there, but ours is the night of despair. Do you not pity us, and would you not come to us, even from the Father's house of many mansions?"

Once more did the wild tempest speak in softened tones—

"I shall be satisfied."

As the fountains of her tears were dried, Annie repeated:

"Satisfied—satisfied—to leave the perishable draperies of earth and, clad in the spotless robes of immortality, advance in progress and knowledge bordering on the Infinite, and, darling, shall we know you there?"

Then, with a heart no longer restless, Annie lay down by the sleeping Charlie and slept more peacefully than for many weary nights.

CHAPTER XIX.

*Turn back the dial! I would again
Live this life o'er with its sorrows and pain;
Would stand with my comrades when dangers are rife,
Or rest with the brave from the battle of life.*

THE fair-haired boy to whom the mother's last anxious thoughts were given, was alternately grieved and angry at a loss he could not comprehend. But, when he found in Annie the thoughtful guardian, the pleasing teacher and ready playmate, he ceased to regret the past in the enjoyment of the present. When more than two years had passed, and she told him of another home and other friends from whom she had been long away and for whose sake she must leave him, at least for a few months, his large eyes filled with tears and he remembered again the kiss of his babyhood and the soft hand of his mother.

"Who is to be my mamma when you are away?" he asked, "and who stay with me? I can't stay all alone."

"No, darling, some nice lady will come here and take good care of our Charlie, and he must love her."

"I don't want to love her," and the pouting lip and flashing eye verified his word. "Why can't I go with you?" he asked.

"Not this time. You will stay with papa; he would be lonely without his little boy."

After a moment he seemed to grasp a new thought and exclaimed:

"Great Scott! Annie, you shan't go; my own mamma would not like it, and I'll tell my papa to stop it," giving force to his words by stamping his little foot; then rushed crying to her arms.

"My little boy is too much excited," remarked Mr. Fletcher, coming from an adjoining room. "You are not to be forgotten or neglected while Annie is away. Mrs. Barlow and her pretty Agnes are to come and stay with you, so no more tears to-day."

Then, turning to Annie, he continued:

"We hope your absence will not be long; yet, as we cannot in the interval do without some one, I have prevailed on Mrs. Barlow to exchange the wearing labor of her large family for the care of our Charlie and a general supervision of household duties."

"The best possible arrangement. Mrs. Barlow loved Edith, and will be a kind mother to her child. I shall have no more anxiety on his account."

In due time Mrs. Barlow and her young girls removed to the home of Wallace Fletcher, thus relieving Annie from further duties.

There was nothing peculiar in the wish that she had expressed for a change of employment and place. None wondered that she desired, for a season, to escape from care and the noise of a large town.

The resolve to lengthen her stay indefinitely was a secret of her own, casting no shadows before and leaving in its wake no significant word.

The idea of a prolonged absence was not altogether pleasant, for Lewiston had its many attractions.

She thought of its privileges and its people, among whom she had glided from girlhood to mature life.

She loved its shady walks, the chime of its Sabbath bells and the enclosure in the cemetery on whose pointing shaft was chiseled the name of Edith.

A drizzly, misty morning greeted Annie's departure from the city, its grey light half obscuring the familiar objects that were passed on her short drive to the station.

Martial music mingled with the whistle of steam, and men in blue passed along the trains.

War, unappeased and terrible, wasted the land, hushing the low voice of compromise in the cruelties of Libby and Andersonville. Call after call had been answered by self-sacrificing men, and still recruits went forward. A division of newly-recruited soldiers were on the early train, going forth with music and to tempt the hardships of camp and uncertainties of battle.

It was sad to look on so many young men and think of their perilous errand. Think of the homes they had left on that gloomy morning and judge by precedent how many would gladden them again.

Something like a reverential awe crept over the features of Annie as she looked at these young faces, some of them little more than boy soldiers and felt their days should be numbered by their unselfish acts, instead of circling suns.

At Sawmill Junction, a short ride from Lewiston, our young traveller was to leave her military companions and go on another train towards Bradford, which, she found to her dismay, had left the Junction ten minutes before her arrival, thus necessitating a stay of some hours, till the coming of the next train.

Those who have done a like penance may understand the feelings of the poor traveller, as she gathered her long skirts from the unswept floor of a country station house and took the first survey of the ill-lighted room, with its rusty stove and uncomfortable benches. Two tiresome hours she dozed over a weekly journal, reading literature, politics, advertisements and sheriff's sales indiscriminately, till the sun, breaking through the clouds, peeped in at the dirty window and danced saucily in her face.

No second challenge was needed, and, leaving her uncomfortable quarters, she walked leisurely along till she had passed a

quaint old farmhouse, with its yards of cackling, noisy life, to a clump of bushes rising between it and a thickly-wooded grove.

Seating herself on the remains of a fallen tree, she watched a dainty little brooklet as it encircled or leaped over obstacles, like a thing of life. She might have been gleaning practical lessons from the onward stream, absorbing her reflections so much that she did not notice an intruder till a hand rested on her arm, tightening to a grasp, as she attempted to break away from the custody of her disagreeable companion.

"Annie Wilmot, I will do you no harm, but I am starving; will you get me food?"

The question was asked in a voice which thrilled like some half-forgotten sound of the past, while the face, nearly hidden by dark, unnatural hair, was strange and unknown.

"I do not know you," she answered.

"No matter for that, if you will get me food."

"Why do you want in the midst of plenty?"

"Let's say no more; here is money, will you get me food? By heaven, you shall," he said, his eye falling before the searching glance of Annie.

"George Sherman!" she gasped, more in disgust than fear. "I thought you were fighting the battles of our country—you enlisted?"

"While you, like a silly woman, thought, as a consequence, I had been trotted South as a target."

"Deserter! starving because you dare not go where food is to be obtained."

"You need not commission yourself detective, or feel any anxiety about the relation existing between your humble servant and individuals or the government."

"Stop, George Sherman! You are not in a suitable place to play the dictator or seek to influence my conduct by commands or threats. If you would have me comply with your wishes, tell me of my brother. What do you know of Eddie?"

"Nothing—positively nothing."

"Yet you know who stole the money from Mr. Allen's drawer."

"Yes; Will Sherman accomplished that exploit, with the advice and foreknowledge of my honored father. May this bit of information be of service to you; it cannot harm them, Will having journeyed to Canada, while the old man has made his exit yet more certain."

"What do you mean? Has your father left Holman?"

"Yes, but like Brutus, he chose his own way; only, instead of steel, he preferred the hemp."

"I do not understand you."

"Would you comprehend if I should say that he hanged himself last week and, fool-like, took for the gallows the very maple under whose branches the home property was transferred from your father to himself, a writing your mother obstinately refused to sign. Much trouble has it made for both you and us."

"How can you speak so heartlessly? Self-destruction is awful."

"That is the old fellow's look-out—not mine."

Annie felt a shiver of horror at the words and manner of the wretched man, but she had an object in view, and proceeded to make other inquiries.

"How could your cousin abstract money from the drawer without being noticed by some one?"

"I have told you enough and will be catechised no further. I had nothing to do with it, and do not know."

"You do know and can tell me what I wish to learn. Comply with my request, then, wrong though it be, I will get you food."

"Well, it was no very difficult thing for Will to conceal himself in the back store, the door to which opened near the money drawer. Once there, he never ventured out, unless your father was away and Ned walked on the piazza or handed some lady to her carriage."

"Oh, that bright half-dollar," groaned Annie, as she understood its mysterious departure.

"Old Allen at his desk, wheezing over multitudinous books and papers, was not to be feared by the light-footed Will. On one occasion, failing to secure a retreat, he was locked into the store and obtained egress through a window, after destroying in part the fastenings, which imperfections probably remain unrepaired. He was often in the store and saw the exchange of coins which gave the occasion for the final outbreak. Fortune favored the young scamp, who, within the next hour found an opportunity for concealment, where he quietly remained till your brother was sent to the bank by Mr. Allen. Again in luck, he secured the Mexican gold and got off without detection."

"Was the object of his long stay with your father to accomplish the ruin of my young brother?"

"Call it what you please."

"How could you?"

"I told you I had nothing to do with it. It was the old man and Will, who cannot be harmed by what you have just learned."

"You were the abettor of crime."

"Who provoked, by being the first sinner? Not the boy I know, but the mother, who, imagining that women have wonderful rights, exercised hers by withholding her name from a legal document, thus retaining some claim and embarrassing the transfer of property. But enough; you have promised me food, and I tell you again I am starving."

Annie turned from his presence without a word. Her anger and disgust were getting beyond restraint.

"Ah," thought she, as she turned one glance to her roused and rebellious heart, "is this the forgiveness I promised the dying Edith? She knew not what she asked. She did not know George and could not foresee this terrible test. May it prove the last."

Hurrying back, she was soon at the door of the farmhouse.

"Is the mistress at home?" she asked of a sweet, blue-eyed girl who met her at the entrance.

"My mamma is away. Do you want anything?"

"Yes, my dear, I wish for food."

"If my mamma was here she would get you such a nice dimer. If you are very hungry I will get you some bread and cheese."

"Would your mamma be willing, if I gave money to pay?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, without money. She always told me to feed hungry people who have not so many nice things as we."

Away went the little one for the wheaten loaf and rich, yellow cheese, for which Annie placed in her hand a bountiful reward.

As she left the wondering child, the delay and disappointment of the morning came to her in a new light. It had given her the key to a tangled mystery, and fanned to brighter rays the almost dying spark of hope. Would Edward ever come again?

*"He for whom the prayer is said,
For whom kind bosoms yearn,
And for whom such tears are shed,
Oh, when will he return?"*

Feed George Sherman? and she looked down on the food that was to satisfy his hunger. Sooner give it to the fishes in the laughing brook. But, as she neared the sparkling water, she held it more closely in her clasped fingers, lest they might forget and do the more willing bidding of her half-rebellious heart.

George Sherman was indeed a deserter. Having robbed and ruined his father, he enlisted. Thrice his greedy eyes feasted on the volunteer's bounty. Thrice he deserted unharmed by the smell of battle. He began to think it a dangerous game; and, turning his gaze to the pole-star, he bade farewell to the glories of war, thinking the sooner his foot might press a neutral soil, the better it would be for his worthless neck.

 Hiding from the light of day, he travelled under cover of dark-

ness, getting his food wherever a morsel might be obtained. With thousands of treasure in his pocket, he thus skulked his way to the home of a relative, disloyal as himself. With him he hoped for concealment till he had become sufficiently rested to prosecute his journey. But, alas! for human expectations. Scarce had he heard of his father's untimely end, when two strangers—to him suspicious-looking men—were seen approaching the house.

"Officers! officers! run for the woods!" exclaimed his relative.

"How, where, which way?" asked the fugitive, too much excited to understand exactly what was expected of him.

"Forget all you ever knowed. This way. There, now, out of that butt'ry winder, through the barn and across the fields, keeping the old shed atwixt you and the house. Be lively, young man, and not let them ar' critters outrun ye."

Away went George Sherman, through windows, over fences, leaping ditches, casting furtive glances behind, while the perspiration oozed from every pore at the fancied click of a pistol or whiz of a flying ball.

Arrested at length by the uncertain footing and underbrush skirting a morass, he crouched behind some tall flags and looked for the pursuing officers, whose errand at the door of his relative proved them to be Yankee speculators scouring the rural districts for wool in anticipation of higher prices.

Unconscious of this, and supposing his quarters might prove untenable, he hurried with his remaining strength to the thick woodland, whence, from its deepest shades, he was driven by hunger to the feet of Annie Wilmot.

When she had left him alone by the babbling brook, a feeling of guilt and insecurity haunted him and he sighed that he could not return the unlawful gain, which had become worthless in his hands.

"Horrible!" he groaned, sinking to the earth. "Is this the golden harvest, this the fruitage I have pined to glean? Gladly would I change places with old blind John at the poor farm, with

his conscience void of offense and his prospects of a brighter hereafter. Yea, I would give it all—all for which I have bartered my peace, for the lesser boon of forgetfulness."

His unpleasant reflections were ended by the return of Annie. Quickly rising with something of his former arrogance, he said:

"Thank you for this favor. I confess to a kind of fear, lest in consideration of unpaid scores you might feel disposed to pass me over to the hangman, thus having one grand reckoning."

"George," she said, speaking his name more calmly than she had for many years, "the world is wide. I wish you no ill, but Heaven grant that we meet no more till this mortal shall put on immortality, and, in the glory of the One Eternal, shall be merged all the passions of our sinful nature." Then, without waiting for a reply, she left his presence, content that obscurity should veil his future and hide from her knowledge the remaining years of his miserable life. Heaven heard her impulsive prayer—the last of the Shermans had departed to return no more.

CHAPTER XX.

*"The sea of fortune doth not ever flow,
She draws her favors to the lowest ebb,
'Her tides have equal times to come and go,
Her loom doth weave the fine and coarsest web;
'No joy so great, but runneth to an end;
'No hap so hard but may in fine amend.*

—ROBERT SOUTHWELL.

*Till love appear, we live in anxious doubt;
But smoke will vanish when the flame breaks out.*

"HOME again," repeated Annie, as she stood near the dwelling of her parents. It was the same house to which they had fled from the Shermans; the same low moss grown roof, which had sheltered them for many years. There had been new patches fastened on the old garment, glass put in the small high windows, and the tumble-down doors supplied with hinges and fastenings.

Yet it was a dilapidated place, fraught with no interest to the passing stranger.

Annie felt a holy calm as she crept into its shadow, and leaned for a moment against its crumbling posts. A bright light shone cheerily on the darkness and familiar voices came to her, in hushed sweetness from within.

"Glad to see you," said Fred Allen, after the first warm greetings were ended. "I stole an hour from my evening at home to

call herc. This meeting with you is quite as agreeable as unexpected."

"Thank you. It is pleasant to receive such a welcome from old friends and playmates. Can you realize that we have all grown so old?"

"One would suppose you were gray-headed and wrinkled, with crow-feet straggling out from the corners of your dim eyes, and patent grinders instead of your own sound teeth. I am not so sensible of the weight of years and the infirmities of age. I might think myself still a boy if the former neighbors were in their accustomed places, and remembered objects peeped out from every street and lane. But time never forgets. Animate and inanimate are sure of a passing touch, which either crumbles them to ruin, or by its impress, leaves them monuments of flying days. The Shermans, whose names must outlive their possessions, have fallen, George having gone, we know not whither."

"To Canada," replied Annie, "if he was fortunate enough to reach its borders without detection."

Fred listened attentively, while she repeated what she knew of the movements of the remaining Shermans, finishing by asking:

"Will your father believe this story, or will he still think my poor brother a thief?"

"He has long ceased to regard him as the guilty party, but that cannot recall the consequence of his hasty judgment. The instigator, and as I think, the one chargeable with that crime, has done his last work, and hurried with his own hand a recompense for which he need have been in no such indecent haste."

"The man is dead, shall not his faults be buried with him? You remind me of some of my harsh sayings, ere I tried to forget the sins of the Shermans; you thought me wrong, and condemned my hard words, as uncalled for and improper. Why fall into the same evil?"

"A few personal encounters and indignities have enlightened my understanding, and given me a new power of language. The

man, as you say, is dead. Few care to remember him, yet it would be hardly possible, were it right, to entomb the long lists of wickedness and mischief he has bequeathed to memory. We may profitably recall them as connected with, and in fact, the real cause of his overpowering troubles. He died insolvent, and I have been called from my office in Bradford to look after the homestead, which, with all remaining property, must go for the benefit of creditors."

"We once thought the Shermans prosperous. I had no anticipation of the changes brought about by a few years."

"The changes thus far have seemed providential in opening the way for yet one more. You must change this creaking, shaky, scarce comfortable place, for your former home, ere I shall settle down, content that to-morrow shall be as this day."

"A thing to be desired yet quite improbable. We have not the means for its repurchase. Father's salary will not justify a risk on his part, while my purse is unfortunately light. A man with usual health might venture—a woman, never, beyond her cash in hand."

"The story of woman's wrongs again. I hoped you had forgotten them ere this."

"How can I cease to remember while they exist?"

"You can at least let them rest, and tell me what you can do towards bringing about the desired change."

"I would give all that I have, which is about two thousand, including Eddie's gift to mother; a sum quite insufficient to reinstate us in that beautiful house."

"The place is valuable, but your mother's claim will prove an obstacle to other purchasers. Property that is forced into the market sometimes goes at a discount."

A few weeks later, through the efforts and discreet management of Fred Allen, the Sherman homestead slipped quietly back into the hands of its original owners.

"We need but one thing to make us happy," remarked Annie,

as she replenished the blazing fire that threw a cheerful light around their pleasant parlor.

"We all think of Eddie," answered the father, "and the uncertainty of his fate. There are other things, however, that trouble me—sad memories of the past."

"My Harry," spoke the wife, "has ever lived too much in the dark. I have hoped more, and from wretched scenes of poverty, have looked to the happiness of to-night. I did not, however, expect Annie to be so largely instrumental in bringing to us these many blessings."

"No—because no doubt you shared the popular opinion, that I should do wonderfully well, to take care of myself for a few years—then negotiate a kind of second hand marriage with some forlorn widower, equivalent to a lifelong service at scrubbing and mending in a stuffy old kitchen. I think it was Pope who wrote, 'All are but parts of one stupendous whole.' But I was not designed to fit into that nook."

"But," said the father, "is this the general rule by which to judge widowers? Always a poor investment?" And he looked critically to the face of his child as the hot blood surged in crimson waves to the very temples.

"Probably not. Like all other principles it has its exceptions;" and a door quickly closed between Annie and her father.

Harry Wilmot thought long and silently, till his meditations would be caged no longer. Then looking very tenderly towards his wife, asked: "Does my dear ever think that Annie is in any way interested in what she terms a second hand marriage?"

"What do you mean? I don't understand."

"I mean has she more than a friendly interest in Mr. Fletcher and his child? Have you never thought?"

"Never—indeed, never. It must not be. She is our all—we cannot spare her."

"I think you once said we must think of her, not of ourselves.

But as this is only conjecture, let us drop the subject till the future shall open its book of mysteries."

Later in the season a storm of unusual severity was seen slumbering beyond the mountain tops, and when at last it burst in all its fury, all were prepared for the downpour of rain and rushing wind, but none thought of a thunder tempest, with the thermometer within ten degrees of zero. Mr. Wilmot had always enjoyed the grand and sublime. He had no fear as he watched the lightning as it flashed from the east to the west, and listened to the heaviest peals of thunder. To-night with the first vivid light he started—alert for a repetition of the phenomenon. When at last the war of the elements had abated, and the storm had in part spent its rage, he turned from the window, saying:

"'Tis the unexpected that happens. We do not often see good sized trees uprooted and small ones carried by the wind at this season. God pity the soldier, who on such a night as this, has nowhere to lay his head."

"I had forgotten," remarked Annie, "to ask if there was any war news of importance in to-day's paper."

"The Northern army has again been victorious. Lookout Mountain, after a desperate fight, has been left by the columns under Bragg and is now occupied by Northern forces. Not a movement of Grant miscarried, but the loss of life was terrible. Thousands of our men and treble that number on the other." Almost a groan escaped Mrs. Wilmot as she said: "Representing so many vacant chairs and oh! so many aching hearts, whose wounds can never heal."

Here the family separated for the night—silently—yet each knowing that the other thought of the brother and son. Where, where was the idol of the household?

The morning after the storm, the sun smiled joyously on a perfect day. Mrs. Wilmot and Annie were still busy in household matters, when Fred Allen entered unannounced. In fact, he had formed a habit of going to the new home of the Wilmots

in season and out, as his pleasure and convenience dictated. On this occasion after the first genial good morning he turned to Annie and asked: "Do you believe in especial Providences?"

"That depends on what you mean by especial Providence. Is it that all law, both human and divine, are to be changed and set aside, for the benefit of one individual, or a class?"

"I mean especial Providence in the usual acceptance of the term."

"Perhaps not. I think the world is governed by general laws; and there is no digression from them to secure the occurrence of an event which might bring merited reward or punishment to persons or communities.

"It may be in order to speak of my own thoughts and experiences. Since it became evident the Sherman home would be for sale at a reasonable price—the old house where you lived has been to me a very unpleasant sight. A monument—to recall and perpetuate all the unpleasant scenes of your past life. I have wished many times it might go up in smoke. But I lacked the courage to apply the torch lest some one might call it arson. I think last night's tempest shared my feelings without my caution, for on it its wild forces were centered in their strength, and with a single swoop every timber was laid low, not so much as one stone left on another."

"Oh, mother!" gasped Annie, "and only one little week since we left there."

"Yes, Annie, and there is where the Providence comes in. If you had been there you would likely have shared the fate of those old timbers and been hustled to the four winds. Now you have only to sell that bit of land and forget——"

"Forget—O! Fred!"

"No more, Annie, I understand it all. But the bow of promise has never forsaken me, and I am sure that wronged and idolized brother will yet be given back to you, a true type of brave and noble manhood."

As he ceased speaking he touched her pale brow with his lips.

At that moment, as he turned to leave, he remembered a letter he had taken from the office.

"Pardon my carelessness," he said ; "here is a letter I had nearly forgotten," and he placed it in her hand.

"Just as acceptable now," was the reply, and Fred left her presence, but not till a glance at her flushed cheek told him a tale of which he had never thought.

"A letter from Lewiston," remarked Annie to her mother, "and Mr. Fletcher and Charlie are coming here next week."

Mrs. Wilmot looked tenderly in the face of her child, and she too had a revelation.

CHAPTER XXI.

*I would be thine!
Not passion's wild emotion
To show thee, fitful as the changing wind,
But with a still, deep, fervent life-devotion,
To be to thee the help-meet God designed—
For this I would be thine.*

THE expected arrival of Mr. Fletcher caused little excitement and very few words with the Wilmots, the daughter being able to endure to bear all the pain and pleasure of uncertainty without a confidante. None were suffered to know her thoughts or enter the inner sanctuary. She rejoiced over past trials, which were withering and growing less in silence. If others should spring from their ashes she doomed them in advance to like obscurity and extermination.

On the appointed day, an hour after nightfall, the Bradford coach stopped before the door of Annie's home. Not the old house, reeling and swaying under the weight of half a century, but near stone steps leading to a cottage—beautiful even in mid-winter—and ranking with the first in Holman.

"Stop, driver," exclaimed Mr. Fletcher, as he emerged from the interior of the coach and glanced at the house, which, in the darkness, he discovered could not be the 'home' of which he had heard Annie speak. "You are leaving me at the wrong door. I told you at Harry Wilmot's."

"Yes, I know," replied the man, as he released a large trunk, "and you will find Harry right in thar, and, most likely, that gal of his, too. You don't seem to understand that the wheel's turned clean round and brought Harry up to his first starting p'int, and I tell you we are all mighty glad on't. He bought that house afore he was married, and would kept right side up if old Bill Sherman hadn't got him to drinking, then bounced on the place and kicked the family outdoors. We all s'posed it would kill his harnsum young wife outright. But she was the right kind of stuff arter all and wouldn't die fer Bill Sherman. I tell you, sir—though I shouldn't wonder if you know more'n I do 'bout it, but that Annie is jest like her mother, only she never was half so good looking. She'll make a feller an awful good wife, no mistake. Only think on't, she worked in the factory I don't know how long, and managed to get money, so, when Bill Sherman hung himself, she contrived to get the place back again. Shouldn't wonder if young 'Squire Allen gin her a lift. He always set great store by Annie, and says she is the best woman he ever see."

"Papa," said Charlie, as he clung, shivering, to his father's hand, "I am so cold out here and I want to see Annie."

"Yes, my son," he replied, placing the travelling fee in the honest palm of the coachman.

"Oh, thank ye, hope that youngster will find a warm fire and see the gal."

"He is not accustomed to the cold and the warm light he can see through the shutters is a trial to his patience."

"Never mind, little chap, these cold nor' westers are a little tough unless Cupid can get up a kind of counter blow. Shouldn't wonder if your pa didn't mind it half so much. But, look here, stranger," he said, seeing his passengers were about leaving him, "when shall I take you back to Bradford?"

"When I get ready to go."

"That's just about the right time. There's no use in hurrying business. Haste, you know, makes waste."

With a low, knowing laugh, the wielder of the whip gathered up his lines and started off on a brisk trot.

"Cool as zero," mused Fletcher, looking after him. "Yet I believe his philosophy more manly than mine. Indifferent to last curt reply, with this cold, cutting blast in his face, whistles a good-natured air, his good sense doubtless pitying irritability. But I was wishing, just then, to be alone with thoughts of the past, my present environments and hopes for future happiness, without reference to the Allens or their mate of Annie Wilmot."

It was not a long way to the cottage door, but Mr. Fletcher had time to forget the unique driver and wonder at his surroundings. He did not expect to find the Wilmots in a beautiful house which, in the semi-darkness of a young moon, he could see was of greater value than Annie's purse could meet. Some one had furnished means. Who but the Allens, and why?

He had never asked Annie Wilmot to be his wife, nor could he recall one look of her quiet face that indicated a thought that she ever would, yet he had often, of late, felt, if another should take the place of his lost Edith, it must be her best loved and most intimate friend.

Uncommonly prepossessing in manner, with a lucrative business, and the influence of sustaining friends, Fred Allen might well be regarded as a dangerous rival.

For days Mr. Fletcher watched thoughtfully the face of Annie Wilmot, trying to gather some word or look by which to regulate his own conduct and feelings. But, alas! for her quiet ways, impenetrable as the most confirmed stoicism.

"The new minister," remarked Annie, as a tall gentleman passed the house in the gathering shades of evening.

"Do you like him?"

"The successor of Mr. Merten could not fail to please me.

"Then you still keep good your prejudice against Mr. Me

who, in the multiplicity of cares and labor might have sinned ignorantly—carelessly at most?”

“I remember him as he was. My first recollection of him was fear. He was cold and unapproachable and I shunned him as the deputy of his much talked of ‘worm that never dies.’ He preached long sermons of the hereafter, while material comforts—such as food and clothes, were of secondary account—and later, that prize essay of mine proved the feather to break the camel’s back. Mr. Merten is not a bad man, but he has too little interest in the comfort and temporal good of his people and not one thought will he tolerate in unison with the advanced ideas of a progressive age.”

“So much for Mr. Merten; what about his successor?”

“I know very little of him. I do not think him a respecter of persons, for only last week he spent one whole night at the bedside of a dying idiot, that his poor mother, a washwoman, might get a little rest for coming duties.”

“Your ministers seem to line up better than those of other professions. But to drop them, what has become of that Fred Allen I once saw in Lewiston?”

“Practising law in Bradford. How careless to forget one to whom we owe so much. His father was first to propose the repurchase of this place after it was known that it must be sold. Fred took the business into his own hands, and when he found a few hundred dollars wanting, unhesitatingly became surety, thus relieving us of all embarrassment. To this he has added many minor favors, all expressive of a warm sympathy in whatever relates to our family.”

“In all this he may have a selfish end in view.”

“No, he was never supremely devoted to self; on the contrary, personal interests frequently become after thoughts with him, proving that there are exceptions to the rule by which the majority are governed.”

“I have more faith in our race than you express. While I

confide in a large portion, you, from the midst of mole-hills, rear a single pyramid and crown it with rarest laurels. Are you sure that Mr. Allen will be less selfish than his brothers? Will he not, ere long, claim something in payment for these many favors?"

"The money for which he is responsible to other parties is to be paid. That is all. He will hardly accept our thanks for other obligations. I think the memory of his father's harshness to Ned may have impelled him to some generous acts. But Fred was always kind to every one."

"If his attentions to your family are marked with more kindness, or his aid more frequently offered to you than others, do you not think that he may be left to conclude that these unusual services are deserving some reward? And since, more than gold or silver, he needs a wife, may he not, by dexterous management, claim you as a recompense which shall cancel all obligations—few or many—of the past?"

"No. We have long been friends, and since he has never betrayed such motives, I will not do him the injustice to think they have existed."

"I have given you the credit of loving Fred Allen."

"How do you know that I do not? There are different kinds of love. One of pity, another of complacency, esteem, gratitude, and so on. Yes, I am sure I love him. It may not be with a passionate devotion, yet it is love."

"Thank you for your honesty and plain speaking."

"I have no motive for concealment and nothing to hide."

"Then tell me," drawing his chair very near to Annie's, "can you find for me a higher love than you have given to your school-mate?"

"I may have a high estimate of your character, yet not quite understand what you ask."

"Then listen as I say: I would have the first place in your affection. Annie, will you be my wife, the mother of my Charlie?"

Annie Wilmot knew she was listening to a proud and sensitive man, who would never repeat an avowal of his love to one who should once refuse its priceless wealth. Thoughtfulness was in her eye and a bright crimson on her cheek.

"You have," she at length said, "given me very little time to think of your words. The acquaintance of years, especially the last few months, may render it unnecessary. You know my life, my position in society, that the first bright ripple of my girlish love was given to another, that it swelled to a sweeping torrent; then its mighty waves rolled back. That I have long loved you I will not deny. But past experience bade me beware and give with caution where no word had assured me it would be accepted or returned. If, as your wife, I can make you happy, and be to the little one left in your care, all that a mother can be, I, too, shall be happy in the love and fulfillment of every duty as wife and mother."

Wallace heard her through and was content, though he, like all other lovers, would have asked more demonstrative words. Neither Annie nor Mr. Fletcher supposed that hasting suns would bring them only joy and smiles without tears. The enthusiasm of first love had paled, yet each regarded the other with a kind of reverence founded on virtuous principles, and the confidence and trust which made them one in heart and desire should ever prove the "silken cord, fast and strong."

With a look that betrayed only hope and trust, Mr. Fletcher asked permission to take Annie to his distant home ere the snows should melt from the fields or the forest air catch up the breath of spring's earliest flowers.

"My friend," replied Mr. Wilmot, "you have asked for our earthly all. Our selfish hearts would still retain her. But the fullness of her love stole away from us ere we were aware of its wanderings. We can only bid her go, and pray that she may be happy. She has told us of you, of your standing as a citizen, your love for the friendless, your pity for the wretched, your

kindness and affection for a frail and gentle wife. We do not fear to trust her in your arms. Guard with a sleepless care this holy gift, that remorse come not to your heart, filling with useless regrets the measure of your existence. I do not speak these words through fear that you will at any time prove an unworthy husband. No! but I remember when life held forth to me all that it promises to you. The tempter came—and all was lost!”

“Not all, my dear sir,” replied Mr. Fletcher. “I think you have much remaining to make life pleasant. I trust your daughter will never have occasion to regret the anticipated change. It may not be wrong for me to say that I thank you for this one reference to the misfortunes of your earlier life. We shall both feel better. I know it all, let that suffice. I would not hear you or your family speak of it again. Be assured that I respect you none the less for the past. For the present I honor you, and trust that in various ways I may add to your comfort and prosperity.”

That night, as Mr. Fletcher and Annie were standing alone by the western window in the pleasant parlor, just as the sun declined and sent its lengthening rays on the crusted snow, sparkling like myriads of precious stones, Wallace took the hand of Annie in his own, and, as he looked tenderly down on her happy face, spoke of the present and the future.

“It needs no token,” he said, “to remind us of this day, of our mutual pledge so willingly given in the presence of the unseen and loved.”

As he ceased speaking he placed on her tapering finger a circlet of gold studded with precious stones, surrounding a diamond. For this Annie was quite unprepared. She had only thought of the earnest love of a true and noble man, and her hand trembled in his as she whispered—“Edith.”

“Yes, Annie,” he said, “it is a duplicate of the one I placed on Edith’s finger, and it was never removed. She wore it as the bride of Death. Will the similarity trouble you?”

“Indeed not. I shall treasure it with care, even reverence.”

The next morning as Mr. Fletcher was about starting, he asked: "What shall I tell Mrs. Barlow for you?"

"That I remember her words and noble example, which have much to do with my present happiness and future expectations. And dear little Celia Burnap—I had nearly forgotten her."

"But she remembers you as the author of her happy prospects. Harry Flint is a fine fellow, has saved quite a sum, and they will be married in the spring."

"I am glad for Celia," replied the loving girl; "she was always too beautiful and frail to battle with life alone."

The two weeks' visit of Mr. Fletcher and Charlie was ended, and they bade good-by to the Wilmots, while our old friend, the coachman, waited the appearance of his passengers with his usual patience and good nature.

"Haven't seen you since that night you cum," began honest John. "You wasn't very well then. Have thought of you when I've been driving by, but guessed you'd got better. Nothing like country air for you city chaps."

"Your country air has been neither kind nor civil. It has given me a severe cold, in consequence of which I have been detained several days."

"No matter for that, since you was in the right place, near enough to Heaven to see the angels, and mebby get an arm round sum of them." With these last words he sent a glance towards Annie, who was placing her last fond kiss on the lips of Charlie.

Wallace made no reply, but John, the coachman, went on to give yet more evidence of his discernment.

"You see, I've driven this stage thirty year er thereabout, and, like the observant postmaster, have had a real good chance to know other folks' business. But, like the postmaster, I find 'tis best for me to think and let others talk."

By this time Mr. Fletcher and Charlie were snugly tucked within the warm robes and all things ready for a start.

Annie watched the departing coach as it slipped smoothly over

the icy road in the grey of morning and heard the Yankee Doodle as its notes came back from the lips of funny John, till the sounds became very soft and indistinct. Then, turning into the house, she said, as she found her mother in the breakfast room, "That man will whistle his own funeral march from constant habit. An interruption would be impossible. You have known him from a boy—was he always such a noisy, strange man?"

"Not always, though the habit is of long standing."

"How does it happen that he is not married? He is such a monument of whistling amiability, I do not like to think of him as a crusty old bachelor."

"It is the old story, Annie, of an early disappointment. Yet he is not morose, and should not be thought so. He once had a good-looking face, which, with his kind nature, made him quite a favorite in spite of some odd ways. He became the accepted lover of Miss Meags."

"Not Betsy, the doctor's sister?"

"The same. She was a fine-looking girl in those days, overflowing with life and humor. Her friends were displeased with the growing friendship. Betsy pouted and was very wilful at first, but finally decided to wait for a man of more refinement. When John understood the cold looks of the Meags family he allowed the affair to end, with very few words, but took to whistling as a medicine. From that day it seemed the balm for all his wounds. Miss Meags, left on the hands of her family, has become selfish and disagreeable in her unsuccessful search for more refinement."

"If they have waited long enough, one would think they might give up the idea of refinement and accept John, who would, with all the fuss, get much the worst of the bargain."

"The family would most likely agree to such an arrangement now, for he has accumulated quite a fortune. But he says that teasing doesn't look manly and he will not think of it. I do not think, with all his queerness, he would ask a woman twice."

CHAPTER XXII.

*Though all her former functions are no more
She rules the circle where she served before;
With eye unmoved and forehead unabashed
She dines from off the plates she lately washed.*

—BYRON.

*"They had not skill enough your worth to sing
For we who now behold the present days
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to praise.*

—SHAKESPEARE.

THE visit of Mr. Fletcher was known to very few of the good villagers of Holman. He came in the evening hours, frequented no public places, and started for Lewiston in the early morn.

Mr. Allen saw the tall stranger as he occasionally visited the store with Annie's father. The sweet, happy face of the young Charlie came also, flitting before his old eyes like some bright thing of the past that had disappeared, leaving its shadow to disturb his remaining years. He turned his head and brushed a tear from his furrowed cheek, as he thought, "Eddie Wilmot once came and went, the music of his voice echoing through this dingy old house like the song of spring's earliest bird. His face was sunny, while his features were faultlessly beautiful, even more lovely than this sweet child, who has never known an un-

gratified wish." Again the old man looked at the bright vision and turned away to conceal his emotions.

"Eddie! Eddie!" he murmured, "consigned to an unknown fate by my strange folly; my false ideas of justice, and uncompromising sternness. It was a mad infatuation, a blind, inexcusable error, which must bring me in sorrow to a grave scarcely more honored than yonder unmarked mound where William Sherman, wrapped in his shroud of sins, has been laid for his final rest."

Thus the man of prosperity thought, and communed with the days and deeds he could not recall.

The departure of Mr. Fletcher and his son did not lift the cloud or quiet his condemning heart. Harry Wilmot had remained in his employ, faithful and uncomplaining. As he looked into his patient, sad face he wondered whether that father could forgive! wondered whether his amiable wife could kneel at morning and evening hour and not ask that the avenging sword be drawn between himself and his only idolized child? Could the sister—once the favorite at his home—the injured but silent Annie, forgive?

"Ah, Annie," he thought, "better thy hardest words, telling of blighted hopes and pleasures, a pathway strewn with withered flowers and a worshipping love frozen by a terrible grief—better this—better anything than thy proud, mute agony. No sigh, no look tells me of thine inner soul, but I know beneath the ken of mortal vision, I am regarded as the spoiler of thy happiness, and it may prove the cause of thy brother's ruin."

For two days the old merchant gave very little time or thought to the business of his store. From morn till late at night he leaned over his desk, thinking morbidly of events which had long since passed beyond his control.

Mr. Wilmot saw the shade on the brow of his employer, but did not ask the cause.

Mrs. Allen knew that her husband was troubled, yet she too was silent. All night she listened to his oft-repeated sigh and suf-

ferred him to go from his home the following day without one explanatory word.

Mr. Wilmot was not indifferent, neither was the wife careless of her husband's happiness. Both knew the root of bitterness and wisely felt the folly of any attempted comfort.

At last the olden look came creeping back to the haggard face and the father smiled sadly—yet it was a smile—when he saw his favorite boy dash boldly up to the door with a spirited nag with which he had made a trial trip from Bradford.

"Well, there, Fred Allen, if that ain't you," said Jockey Joe, stepping out from the crowd. "Who'd have thought of your driving like Jehu?"

"No, no, Uncle Joe," replied the young man, springing from the sleigh, "I have not driven, only allowed the animal to come her own pace. I am thinking of buying this Lady Fleet and paying for her the snug little sum of five hundred. Will it prove a good thing or an extravagant joke?"

"Five hundred! whew, what an orful price for a hoss. Afore this pesky war you could buy a drove for less than a hundred apiece."

"Not like that one, Uncle Joe."

"Well, mebbly not," he replied, assuming a degree of official importance and squinting critically at the straight limbs and gracefully curved neck of the animal as she stood champing and pawing, apparently conscious of her merits and proud of her unusual abilities and attractions. "Shouldn't wonder," continued Joe, "if she was a putty smart critter, but I couldn't tell without trying her."

"Suppose you test her speed by riding round the square, and when you have ridden all that you wish drive up to the stable; you will find the key in the house if the door is locked."

"Well, guess there won't be nothing bad in riding atween them warm robes with that hoss on ahead. Anyhow, I'll see what about it."

"Do your best, little pony," said Fred, as he patted her affectionately, while Uncle Joe made himself comfortable in the sleigh. The next moment Lady Fleet obeyed her master's injunction, and, by a light, graceful movement, left the curious men and boys who were lounging carelessly around the country store, and went bounding through the streets of Holman.

"Ah," thought Fred, as he looked after the twain and the gliding sleigh till they disappeared by turning in another direction, "Uncle Joe is indeed a happy man. His desires are few and simple. With no brain for subtle reasoning, no unbounded ambition, or harassing cares, he is content in his humble calling and never more delighted than when in the company of his favorite animal. No doubt he will live a year longer for having been intrusted with that valuable horse for a single half-hour. How easy to make others happy without injuring ourselves."

Fred entered his father's store, shook hands with one and another of the old neighbors who had dropped in to exchange their farm productions for the groceries or dry goods to be found at Mr. Allen's. Betsy Meags was there, called to the spot by the reported arrival of new goods, from which she would have the first choice, if not for herself, decide which would be best for her many needy friends. She was still the doctor's maiden sister, one of his household, with no object or aim in life beyond passing the present hour, which too often hung heavily on her hands.

"You are looking careworn," said Fred, as he stood by the desk and looked into the still troubled face of his father. "I hope there has been no unpleasant occurrence."

"No, my boy, but how can a man bearing the weight and memories of more than threescore years always keep bright and happy? But no matter about that now. I want to tell you there is a bit of news afloat interesting to some of your friends, if not to you."

Here the face of the father lost its sadness and his eye met that of his son with much of its more youthful merriment.

"Indeed, father, what can it be? You know I am interested in all things that concern my friends."

"Yes—but there may be times when it might be well to be interested for one's self."

"Certainly, but just now my interest centers in the gossip. What is it? Is Aunt Betsy about being married? I see she has before her an endless array of goods and is calling the remaining stock from the shelves."

"Betsy Meags married," mused the elder Allen. "No! her heyday has passed, and now, like her contemporaries, must look towards the west—see the lengthening shadows and the setting sun. Perhaps she is waiting for you. Another ten years will bring it all right."

"I might do worse. But all this talk does not bring me nearer the news."

"Do not fly off in a boyish fever. I was about to tell you that Annie Wilmot is to be married. Her father told me of it not an hour ago."

"To whom?"

"Oh, that man with whom she lived so long after his wife died. He has been visiting here with his beautiful curly-haired boy."

"Wallace Fletcher," exclaimed Fred, "a man of wealth and influence. He will take Annie to one of the finest homes in Lewiston. The world has never been overkind to the poor girl, and I am glad a valiant arm is to come between her and some of the harsher things of life. She will make the good and trusting wife, the kind mother and the queenly mistress of Fletcher's pleasant mansion."

"And yet you stood by and let another carry off the woman of many virtues. Do you expect to find one who can float a longer string of adjectives?"

"Few girls can claim as many. I know her worth; yet, father, between Annie Wilmot and myself there exists none of those ties

which should be the strong band of union in the marriage relation. We understand each other and know that without this fortress of love little faults would be like water on a half-blazing fire. She has suited herself and will be happy."

As he turned to leave he encountered Miss Meags, who had, unfortunately, come in contact with a banana peel carelessly left on the floor. Fred's timely aid prevented an accident. But the bad boy was on deck and summoned more observation by saying:

"Gala day for you, Aunt Betsy; pray the gods for more banana peel and gallant knights to the rescue."

"Saucebox," retorted Miss Meags.

"Never mind," said Fred, "boys will be boys——"

"I know, but need not have a divided foot and horns."

Fred bit his lip and again attempted to bow himself out, but between him and the outside world stood the ireful woman and her questions.

"You have concluded that man cannot live alone. Changed your mind, have you?"

"Not changed at all. I love society too well to sigh for

"A lodge in some vast wilderness.'"

"You may feel poetical, but don't quote Cowper to help you out, since your early marriage to Annie Wilmot is the common talk. Every one knows it. You know my brother the doctor is town clerk, and I asked him last night if you were published."

"Ah," answered Fred, "is that question your proof? Rather weak circumstantial evidence. I have heard that Annie is to be married, but I am not the fortunate fellow who has won the prize—for prize it is."

"Do tell; am glad I spoke to you and found out the mistake—as no one thought of any one but you."

"You can inform your friends that, much to my chagrin, there is a misapprehension in this matter. I am not quite ready to

astonish the world with any love affair of my own, though such a thing may happen some time. In the meantime, think it quite possible for another man to marry Annie."

"Well, Fred, I never quite believed that it would be so, that you could really think of marrying that girl, though it looked a little like it sometimes. You was always very nice and manifested quite a liking for her, I know. But I told the doctor's wife it did not seem possible that a young man of your standing with your education and property, could go into such a family for a wife and get nothing but a factory girl at that. I do not suppose," she said more softly, as she noticed the scowl torturing young Allen's face, "Annie is really the worse for having spent her life in noise and dirt, if it was to her liking. You know some one said we live in the atmosphere of our own creating. I think I know of girls—yes, my brother the doctor has two, who would look a long way for different surroundings. But the facts are she went there because there was a necessity in the case. Too poor to stay at home, too poor to be sent to school, and all the education she got was in the chimney corner, with her old father for schoolmaster. She may thank you and your father that they are better off now. Let Annie Wilmot go where she may, her name will follow her and every one know she came from low ancestry, and the employment she has chosen all these years equally degrading."

For a moment Fred Allen stood in silent astonishment and bit his lip in real vexation. Then, in a voice clear and earnest, replied:

"Excuse me, Miss Meags, if I differ with you on every point. How many of us can boast a better parentage? From the boy to early manhood Harry Wilmot was the cultured and admired favorite of all. Then came the one dark chapter in his life. But the tangled net was broken, and he walks with us to-day, a sadder yet as true a man as before he struggled in the toils of William Sherman. And tell me, Miss Meags, where can you find the

equal of Harry Wilmot's wife? Now, what of Harry Wilmot's daughter?

"She never faltered in well doing or felt that any honorable employment was degrading. If she has created her own atmosphere, shaped her own life, nobly has she done her work. Brave and determined, she has passed from the child to the woman without a single spot on her fair name."

"Oh, Fred, you did not understand me. I did not mean, I did not——"

"No matter, my friend, I have but a few words more touching Annie and her low parentage, and in justice to them all these words should be spoken. Let me say that in book acquisition and practical knowledge she stands far in advance of the girls of her age, for whose education hundreds of dollars have been paid to academies and seminaries of learning. And now she marries a man of name and wealth, who will give her, as his wife, her true position in society. I rejoice to feel the dear girl is to reap a harvest from the good seed she has been sowing all her life. These are the facts, and none dare to say me nay."

Bowing to his wondering listeners, young Allen left the store with his father's blessing that he had so quietly and yet so bravely championed the Wilmots against the jealous envy of Betsy Meags. That he was greatly disturbed, even angered, we need not say, and disposed to say many hard things of the woman he had just left, call her the village slanderer, with a tongue like the asp, and delighting to feed on the fair name of others, more precious to them than the heart's blood. As he walked on the winter breeze cooled his fevered brow and another picture shaded his vision. A gentle nature soured by an early disappointment, the strong, true love of an affectionate heart trampled on by family pride, as it looked for better chances that never came, and Betsy was left to plod through life, unloving and unloved. Then the kind heart of Fred relented and he pitied where he had disliked.

Engrossed in his own reasoning, he was too busy to notice a

trim little figure at his side, till his own name was spoken in a low and well remembered voice.

"Annie Wilmot," he said, extending his hand.

"Just now and here," she answered. "This is an unexpected pleasure, though I hoped to meet you later. You seemed lost in profound thought. Not studying a sermon, of course, but perhaps a brief for some poor client."

"Not that; I have just heard of your intended marriage to Mr. Fletcher, and was on my way to extend my best wishes and congratulations."

"Oh, thank you, Fred; your kind wishes are a great deal to me; more than you think."

"My good wishes you have always had, and, more than that, my faith in your future has never faltered. So, you see, if, as some think, our thought has a subtle influence on events that may environ another, no doubt of mine has held you back from success."

"Are you a believer in this new thought?"

"Not so very new—only a revival from the past. But it is quite too complicated for a street argument. I have not had time to consider it enough to decide its merits. But new ideas are usually deserving a second thought. You know the world moves.

"But this is not telling me of the sweet by and by when I shall feel obliged to drop the familiar name of Annie and adopt the more conventional one of Mrs. Fletcher."

"Oh, Fred, it will always be Annie."

"To me it will. But the looker-on might demand more respect for the wife of Mr. Fletcher. But when the wedding?"

"The day is not fixed. In about two weeks."

"So soon? Much as we regret the loss of a friend, we are glad for you. You will go from the common comforts of life to wealth and splendor, yet will scarcely know it. The heart that has loved for virtue and integrity, acknowledging no other distinction, will realize very little difference. I only hope the man you have chosen is worthy."

"You do not know Wallace or you would be sure."

"But I know you," and Fred looked with a brother's love on the animated face at his side. "The man who is truly deserving the prize must be far up in the moral scale of worth."

"Oh, stop, foolish—foolish. But here is my street, where we must part. When you get so as to talk more common sense we will meet again."

"You hardly reciprocate my compliments."

"Good-by, Fred, good-by," and Annie was gone.

Young Allen passed in an opposite direction, to his own home, quite forgetting his new horse, till he saw the rough, animated face of Jockey Joe returning from his short excursion with the Lady Fleet.

"Thought I'd seen hoss flesh afore," he began on meeting Fred, "but, my stars, I never was snaked over the road so much like a streak. She's in the stable now, and I gin the key to your mother ag'in."

"Then you like my nag?"

"Like her? Well, I rather think I do. When a feller's born with a sort of liking for hoss flesh, how could he help loving such an awful spirited critter as that of yourn. She's harnsum, and knows it, too. Then she trots so easy and fast. Jerush! won't she go like lightning. You just train her and won't she l'arn near about as much as some men. Guess I'll be round ag'in in the morning and see you off."

Jockey Joe never rose with the lark, so, before the promised call was made, Fred, with his newly-obtained horse, was nearing the suburbs of Bradford.

CHAPTER XXIII.

*It is most genial to a soul refined
When Love can smile unblushing, unconcealed;
When mutual thoughts, and words, and acts are kind,
And inmost hopes and feelings are revealed;
When interest, duty, trust, together blend,
And the heart's deep affections are unsealed;
When, for each other, live the kindred pair;
Here is indeed a picture passing fair.*

—TUPPER.

CALM and beautiful was the day preceding Annie Wilmot's bridal eve. Night came on with no cloud in the horizon, while the pale moon shed her soft, benign rays on the few friends who had been invited to meet that evening in the parlor of Harry Wilmot. The room was tastefully arranged, and flowers from friends both at home and abroad bloomed in its nooks and corners on that winter night.

Annie had never been pleased with ostentatious display. In the pleasures of life, or its tragedies, she had tried to feel it was the common lot and should be met with courage and little demonstration. To-night, the happiest of her life, must prove no exception. Quite unattended, leaning on the arm of Wallace Fletcher, she entered the room where the favored few awaited her coming. Her manner graceful and self-possessed, her dark, intelligent eye and face of kindly love, giving a charm to her features, vieing in

beauty with the pink and white of the modern belle. Her dress was of plainest white, with no ornaments save a single diamond, gift of Mr. Fletcher, and in her hand a bunch of white roses, valued gift from the loving children of Mrs. Barlow. Then a few simple words placed in Annie's womanly crown another stone—the precious gem of wife, at the same time giving to her love and care the child of her cherished Edith. When she felt the boy's soft breath on her cheek and heard his whispered words—

"You are my own mamma now and will stay with me always"—she prayed that her love and patience might never fail while she sought to guide his steps to a high and noble destiny.

She had often spoken to the listening boy of his mother's many virtues, to the husband of his gentle wife. There was to be no change. Without a shade of jealousy, recollections of Edith were to be encouraged and her name live on, honored by those she had once so dearly loved.

Fred Allen clasped the hand of the new-made wife, and, as a brother's kiss rested on her lips, the unbidden tears told of one unremoved obstacle to her present and future happiness. The elder Allen, though an invited guest, remained sadly at home with visions of the past flitting before his fevered brain. "And yet," he mused, "I have dared think of a wedding gift for the sister," and, rising, he took a small box from the table, in which was hidden a pretty token for Annie, and locked it in the darkest corner of his desk, adding, "never, never," and turned again to his bitter thoughts.

The next morning Mr. Fletcher started for their Lewiston home, not, however, till the debt on the home had been liquidated and the property given again into the hands of Mr. Wilmot, unencumbered.

"Think not," said Mr. Fletcher, "this is to bring about a permanent separation in your family. Whenever you tire of Holman, or weary of work and housekeeping, my home shall be your

home and my happiness be increased by administering to your comfort."

"To Lewiston and back," remarked Annie, as the train whirled away from Bradford, "has been my programme for the last ten years."

"Have you never been discouraged? I think I never heard you complain of more than one thing."

"What was that? the Sherman family?"

"Your denunciations of the Shermans could not be called grumbling. I never heard you speak of them without a positive accusation, condensed, pointed and plain. In different tones I have heard you regret your weak position and womanly creation."

"Only the condition, not the character, of which I complain. I glory in the fine feelings of a true woman. Her forgetfulness of self, her quick and intuitive perceptions. Yet of what profit are there endowments if she is always to be kept within prescribed limits, even as the Turkish lady is jealously cared for within the harem of her lord."

"She will transgress no civil code by taking for herself a wider and, if she please, a different field for action."

"If she would do so, scoffers and opponents would stand round and give her room. But common usage is stronger than legislation."

"The pioneer of a great reform has no easy work."

"Few know the wrong, or understand the necessity of an amendment. The popular mind is dark, the popular voice silent, or raised only in opposition and scorn. Progress is dilatory. Right is a great while in overcoming wrong. The bright examples of a few will, I trust, awaken the many of our women to measure their own strength and make it of some practical use to themselves and the world at large."

"Do you think, Annie, the gifts heaven has conferred on your sex quite thrown away? The greater a woman's mental wealth the higher her moral attainments, the happier must be her home

and husband, and the better the influence she exerts on his children."

"The mother should, indeed, be intelligent, and her influence true and holy, while the father should gird himself to meet like responsibilities and duties. The married woman owes her first thoughts to her family; but, if I mistake not, there is a class who have neither husband nor money on which to depend, many of them with small children to be fed, clothed and educated. Such persons should have more means, better chances, their sphere should be widened. Pay them for their labor according to their efforts and capacities, that no midnight goblin shall dare paint in hideous dreams the cheerless hearth, the empty table, the bed of straw, winding up with the pauper's drive over the stones. Change would, of course, bring about new conditions, but, surely, not worse than those existing at the present time. You smile at my enthusiasm, considering it may be, if my thoughts should not be confined to the work and services involved in my new relation, instead of wandering away to the general interests of others."

"No, Annie, you are not to be burdened with cares that will not allow you to think of whomsoever or whatsoever you please. I smiled at your earnestness, which, I hope, will not lead you to a lecturing tour—just as I thought you mine beyond abstraction."

"Never fear; I have no faith in going beyond one's depth. I could not profitably lecture more than one man, nor am I sure he will prove a patient auditor."

Here the colloquy was interrupted by a business friend of Mr. Fletcher, who was, as he remarked, "on his way to Niagara."

"Why," asked Mr. Fletcher, "in this mid-winter, when everything is frozen and freezing?"

"The very reason why I go. I have seen Niagara in summer time, in all its resistless strength and glory. But never in winter, when the breath of the Frost King had studded with jewels every visible thing, thus adding to the wild beauty of the place and

making of it a spot of most enchanting loveliness. I have long wished to visit there in winter, but this is my first opportunity."

"About this time the ice bridges form, I think."

"Yes, and with me the formation of those ice bridges, from little blocks of ice, has always been a wonder, and was quite an inducement for my present trip."

"The display is grand, but don't risk your neck by crossing one from shore to shore."

"That is what many enjoy, and yet more, they put tents and small buildings midway of these ice bridges for refreshments of all kinds, and I fail to remember any accidents."

"And yet there is danger. The ice from the lake may come down at any moment, producing a pressure on the bridge below; then the peril would be beyond compute. Human life should not be risked for a song."

Then the talk drifted to the affairs of state. Both were loyal and had sympathies in common, but differed in regard to the conduct of the war. While Mr. Fletcher felt the country had done its best, the President and cabinet working with sleepless energy to bring the bloody struggle to an honorable close, his friend was too impatient for the end. Instead of considering the magnitude of the war, the difficulties that had been overcome, and the formidable obstacles yet to be met and vanquished, he was disposed to trace every defeat to the door of the President and his advisers.

"Too many mistakes," he said, "yes, too many blunders. This affair should not at first been taken as a schoolboys' holiday frolic. It should have been taken as it really was—a serious matter."

"I agree with you there; we should, as a people, have roused at the first note of rebellion, and, following in the steps of Andrew Jackson, crushed it ere it had assumed the present hydra dimensions."

"Yes, and when our eyes were opened we should have had more

energy. A Napoleon at the helm, this old ship of state would have sailed on smooth, unruffled seas long ago, yes, long ago."

With his last expressed sentiment he bowed politely and passed along.

"An admirer of Napoleon, I see," remarked Mr. Fletcher, as he turned to guess the effect on Annie.

"No doubt," she replied, "the Corsican had wonderful military ability, first manifested when quite young at the siege of Toulon, and, later, war was his pastime. I do not like to think of him, because I would tolerate war as the last resort of a nation to sustain its liberty and home."

"Yet Napoleon was idolized by the French and was, no doubt, the greatest general Europe ever knew. The legions that rushed to his banner knew only conquest and victory. He tells us he fought for France. For her he was willing to sacrifice all, even the gentle Josephine."

"Yes, and I know the goal, to him, would never have been reached till all Europe had been subjugated. The glories of war may crown a few, but, oh! how many lives went out to secure for the conqueror those bloody trophies, while all that is left to them and theirs is the fame of leaving their bones in some noisome fen or faraway hillside to bleach in the frosts of winter and heat of summer suns."

"Abbott," replied Mr. Fletcher, "tells us that civilization rolled back half a century at Waterloo, where the man whose ambition had sacrificed millions of the French was defeated and captured, and on the rockbound coast of St. Helena, amid the war of elements, his stormy life went out.' Thus ended the life of one the world called great.

"No sound can awake him to glory again."

"One the world called great. This implies a doubt in your mind."

"He had wonderful ability," replied Annie, "nor did he hide his talent in a napkin. The question centres on the word great. Was his, or was it not, a perverted genius?"

"He has," replied Wallace, "left a name that is, and must ever be, illustrious, grand and unparalleled as a soldier, and, though his erect figure no longer sweeps along the line of battle, to the warrior there will ever be a thrill connected with his great, unbounded courage."

"You use the wrong word—ambition rather than courage."

"That he was brave you cannot deny, and we will call his greatness made up of the two—ambition and courage."

"Do you," asked Annie, after a moment's thought, "recall the man of great attainments who, in Pollok's 'Course of Time,' is compared with the lowly one, who never went from the sight of the smoke of his father's chimney, and which, in the sight of heaven, was the greater?"

"I remember many similitudes in that book, but were its extravagant vagaries healthy food for the mind of a sensitive child?"

"I read the book more as a story, and its wild and thrilling pages awakened wonder in my young mind that one could possess such unbounded resources and imagination so vivid and exhaustless."

At this point Lewiston was announced and the young Charlie danced for joy. He had been a quiet listener, yet silently impatient for the freedom and frolic he would soon have in his own home.

A select number of friends awaited at the home of Mr. Fletcher the arrival of the small bridal party. Kind Mr. Sanford was there, a little older than when we first saw him, but his heart was still young and gladsome. With a frame erect, the uncomely touches of time were lost on his genial face. .

"Who would think," he said, taking Annie's hand, as she descended the stairs from the chamber where she had left her wraps and made a hasty toilet, "who would think the bride of to-night so nearly allied to the quiet, shrinking girl with whom I fell in

love on her first arrival in Lewiston? I thought there was good in store for you, because real effort must be successful. But I did not think of all this."

"So, Mr. Sanford, you think, all things considered, I am getting rather overpaid."

"No, no; it is just as I would have it. The wonder is that I can have things arranged to my liking and be able to wish you joy, without some doubts concerning your future. You said you should find friends if you proved yourself worthy. You have found many. Virtue, for once, has been richly rewarded."

"Celia," said Annie, as, later in the evening, she stood by the side of a fair, beautiful lady, in costly though plain attire, "they tell me you have been married since our last interview, an event I expected, though, perhaps, not quite so soon. Where is your husband?"

"He came with me, but is waiting till you have received the congratulations of your more intimate friends. You will see him soon. We have looked forward to this time with equal impatience."

"Our pretty Celia Burnap is now the wife of Henry Flint. It does not sound easy yet; but, like other new things, it will soon become familiar."

"We are very happy, Mrs. Fletcher. You did not know the real good you were doing me when you exerted your influence in my favor against the purposes of Mr. Ashley. I was young, and might have hastened to some sad end had not your interference changed the course of things. I meant well, so have others, whose good intentions have been finally overruled by discouragements till they walk in our midst like the one of whom we read possessed of many evil spirits. When Mr. Ashley sought to crush me by an act of his despotic will, you procured for me the means of an honest livelihood. I became acquainted with Mr. Flint, since which time every day has brought to me some new enjoyment."

"I am glad to find you so happy, Celia. Yet you must not ex-

pect to find everything in life exactly to your mind. As a housekeeper you will probably find a disagreeable mingling of perplexities and pleasures, or are you relieved from family cares by a fashionable term of boarding?"

"No; we went directly to Mr. Frazier's home. As he requested us to keep all the old servants I have escaped many trials incident to new housekeepers. They know how the domestic affairs had been managed in the past; we did not wish to make it unpleasant or disagreeable by the introduction of any important change."

Mrs. Fletcher's face expressed bewilderment, as she dreamily inquired:

"You at Mr. Frazier's home?"

"Yes—you have heard of his death?"

"Death! Is Ralph Frazier dead?"

"Yes. He was Henry's uncle, and died last week. I see I have a story to which you cannot afford to listen this evening."

"I cannot afford to wait. Tell me how Henry Flint happened to be the nephew of the wealthy banker."

"Because he was the child of his only sister, whose youthful indiscretion her exasperated father and brother would never pardon. She was driven from her home and found an abode with a distant relative in the country. After this the elder Frazier lived only one or two years, and died without a spoken word of forgiveness. One of his last acts disinherited a repentant child,

—"*whom the God of heaven and earth
Was not ashamed to call His own.*"

"By this violation of right the brother became sole heir to the father's possessions.

"For sixteen weary years the sister lived in seclusion, then she was laid in a small country churchyard, leagues away from the tomb of her family where the rest of her kindred mingle together

in the bosom of a common grave. It makes no difference, yet it is sad to think of the suffering entailed by one wrong act, at last leaving the offender in an obscure grave. I hope that Henry's mother will be placed ere long by the side of her mother, in the shadow of the Frazier monument. From the grave of his mother Henry went forth to battle with the world, fully acquainted with her past life and the unforgiven fault which had separated her from her friends.

"Three years later he came to Lewiston. Here the uncle and nephew met face to face. Each recognized familiar looks in the other. As Henry saw the banker enter his stately home and read the name of Frazier on the door, he knew it was his mother's brother, his only living relative. He lingered one brief moment, looking at the door through which the worldly man had entered, then turned away with higher purposes and firmer resolves.

"Before he had crossed to the next street, Mr. Frazier had followed at a safe distance, never losing sight of him till he saw him enter a boarding-house owned by the company for which Henry has always worked. At an early hour the following day Mr. Frazier visited the company's office and found registered on their books the name of Henry L. Flint.

"'As I thought,' he murmured, 'no other face could look so nearly as Martha's looked years, years ago. Does the boy know his own history? Will he dare breathe it here? Why is this new vexation added to my overburdened heart? Why did this child outlive the mother, his very existence perpetuating and branding deeper the stain her folly had stamped on our name?'

"He did not know Henry or understand the varied feelings that sealed his lips for six consecutive years, till the proud relative saw the handwriting on the wall.

"'Do you know me?' he asked, as Henry stood by his bed, in answer to a summons from the dying man.

"'You are my mother's brother. I have known you long, but chose that you should first speak of this family connection.'

"They remained together many hours, and, ere the close of another day, half of the Frazier wealth had been transferred to Henry. He, in turn, had bound himself to guard well the remaining half for the only child of Mr. Frazier—the little Ralph whom your courage rescued from an untimely end. He is a beautiful child and we already love him tenderly. You see, we have all something by which to remember you."

"I regret," replied Annie, "that one whom I have reason to respect could be so cold and unforgiving to his kindred, yet I am glad for you, Celia, glad that Henry at last received his own with usury."

"Thank you; yet why can't you seem to know how much you have done for Ralph and myself, and by benefitting us, for Henry? We know it, and would gladly acknowledge it by some tangible proof, if you had not thwarted such a wish by placing yourself beyond the need of pecuniary aid."

"You may do for some needy and deserving person all that you thought to do for me."

Here the friends separated.

"Only a woman, yet bearing away laurels a man might well covet," whispered Mr. Fletcher, who had, unnoticed, heard the conversation between the ladies.

"See by this what any woman can do," replied the new wife with a roguish look. "The fault is not that woman cannot—but that she does not—know what she can do and be."

CHAPTER XXIV.

*More than we hoped in that dark time,
When, faint with watching, few and worn,
We saw no welcome day-star shine,
The cold, grey pathway to the morn!*

*Oh, loved of thousands! to thy grave,
Sorrowing of heart, thy brethren bore thee,
The poor man and the rescued slave
Wept as the broken earth closed o'er thee.*

—WHITTIER.

THE din of battle and its wild confusion rolled on while the wail of its many horrors came to us from the field of strife and the desolate home.

Onward! onward! with a dauntless, determined leader, marched the Army of the Potomac, with devastating strength, till it neared the last stronghold of the great rebellion. Yet a nation's heart sometimes trembled in uncertainty. Its people had often listened for the shout of conquest, and, instead, heard the dull tramp of our retreating army before a victorious force. Others had stood on the threshold of success, gazed on the glittering prize, yet loitered till the usurper had strengthened his posts and the golden moment had passed.

"Oh, these sickening details of blood and carnage," remarked

Mrs. Fletcher, laying down a journal she had been reading. "When shall this terrible war end? Shall peace never again spread her broad wings over our sorrowing land?"

"You surprise me," replied her husband. "Through all the past you have been confident, looking beyond the disasters that brought pallor to the strong man's cheek and ploughed more deeply the furrows in his brow. Will you become discouraged now, when all other hearts are hopeful? Will you give up while Grant, with his sleepless thousands, watches at the very gates of Richmond?"

"You mistake," replied the wife, her flashing eye betraying the depths of her feeling, "I was only indulging in a momentary impatience—growing sad over the misery created by this fratricidal war. There have already been millions of treasure destroyed, hosts of brave men have fallen in battle, starved in noisome prisons, or died from disease induced by hardship and exposure. There are lonely homes on every hand, families left to struggle with want, or, it may be, die of actual need. Give up, did you say? No, Wallace, I would not give up. Sooner let the mighty waves of the Pacific overleap their bounds and mingle with the lesser waters of the Atlantic than listen to the clank of slavery's chains sounding from our hilltops and burdening the free air of our Northern homes. But do you know, the end is not yet. Even the fall of Richmond may not terminate our disasters and troubles. We have suffered, and should have learned wisdom, but have we?"

"One hard thing at a time," replied Wallace. "We have been, in a measure, successful. If other difficulties arise, as those with which we are now contending disappear, may we not reasonably suppose there will be a way provided for us to pass through the Red Sea? You are unnecessarily anxious."

Here the noisy Charlie came shouting through the hall.

"Papa," he said, his bright eyes dilating with a joy he could not understand or define, "only think—somebody, I forgot who, has

gone to Richmond. Now won't they stop fighting and let all the poor soldiers come home?"

"My little son means General Grant," said the father, at the same time lifting the child to his knee.

"I mean the man who has gone to Richmond with our soldier boys, and taken it, too."

"Did some boy tell you this?"

"Oh, the newsboy told everybody who could hear; that is not all, I have got a paper," he said, drawing a crumpled sheet from his ample pocket. "I had some coppers mamma gave me and bought a paper because the boy was selling them so fast I was afraid they would all go and you would not get one."

"The child is right," remarked Wallace, looking hurriedly at the little wrinkled extra, so thoughtfully provided by Charlie. "There comes the clang of bells, telling in joyful peals the story of our triumph. I will join the multitude," he continued, leaving his nice easy-chair. "A short visit to the telegraph office may assure us of later news."

For an hour, pressed to the front and crowded back, jostled to the right hand and left, removing his pinched toes from the painful pressure of unfriendly boot-heels, Mr. Fletcher lingered near the office without gaining any certain knowledge beyond the first-received dispatches. Turning to retire as best he could from the excited concourse of men and boys, he met the pleasant face of Mr. Allen.

"We hear the morning stars," said the minister, "as they sing together the song of Bethlehem, carrying glad tidings to the long-enslaved sons of Africa."

"You are sanguine, Mr. Allen. Mrs. Fletcher has, with some weariness and with what seemed a lack of courage, been telling me the end was not yet, the work only begun."

"This contest," replied Mr. Allen, "was not commenced, nor has it been sustained, as were the ancient wars, for conquest. Both parties believed they were fighting for a fundamental truth:

We felt the Union must be preserved and the cry of the bondmen heard no more in our land. Gold has been poured forth, life freely given for liberty and its vital principles. Shall a work thus commenced stop? Shall Freedom retrace her mighty strides of the last four years? I may not see the end, for I have already passed my threescore years. But with expanded vision shall I behold our nation's banner, without a missing star, floating over and folding around a whole people, guarding all, blessing all, and defending every race and color.

"But I am keeping you from your home. In speaking of these things I forget it may be inconvenient for others to listen. Tell Mrs. Fletcher her former neighbor, my brother, from Holman, is here on a visit."

That night when Charlie lay dreaming in his little bed Mr. Fletcher repeated to his wife the words of Mr. Allen.

"Shall I," he continued, "send an invitation from you to the brothers, expressing a wish for them to dine with us tomorrow?"

"Yes," she replied, after some hesitation, "I will write a note which you may send, or take around yourself. The minister should always be a welcome guest. Our old neighbor has been a kind friend in years gone by. His misapprehension of duty has brought to me a sleepless grief. He, too, has suffered and grown old since then, more than in many previous years. Yes, Wallace, bid them come. I think I shall be glad to extend hospitality to one whose doors were never closed on me and whose purse has many times relieved my necessities."

"Thank you, Annie. You are more obliging than I had hoped. The occasion may revive some sad things, but you afford me real pleasure by trying to value and remember the good connected with Mr. Allen's life instead of hiding everything with one great fault."

The next day the minister and his brother entered a carriage

sent by Mr. Fletcher to take them to his residence in another part of the town.

Annie's welcome was cordial and unaffected. Nothing adverted to the "lang syne" they would forget, and no prophetic whisper warned them of coming lights or shades which should disturb or increase their happiness.

Mrs. Fletcher presided at her own table with a grace and dignity quite wonderful to her Holman guest, who expressed his admiration by quiet smiles and a general look of good-nature on his careworn face.

From the dining-hall they returned to the parlor, led by Charlie, who directed the gentlemen to chairs that had been placed for them near a window, from which they might observe many fine houses and other things of interest in that part of Lewiston.

"Charlie is a little boy," said the minister, as he rested his hand on the head of the child, "yet he is trying to make others comfortable and happy."

"My own mamma used to, and I would be like her. But I thought in that easy-chair, with so many nice things around, you might think of a story and be willing to tell it to me."

Mr. Fletcher was too much interested in his own child to notice the presence of Agnes Barlow till her soft hand rested on his own.

"There is a soldier at the door who wishes to see you," she said very timidly.

"Can't you ask him to walk in?"

"Mamma has asked him, but he did not wish to do so. He chooses to see you at the door."

Mr. Fletcher obeyed the summons, but did not observe that he was followed by Charlie, till he had reached the hall.

"My son," he said in slightly reproving tones, "why did you follow me, leaving mamma and those gentlemen in the parlor?"

"Oh, I am going back again, but, papa——"

"What, Charlie?"

"It may be that poor soldier wants to go home and see his little

boy or mother, and perhaps he has not got any money to carry him, because you said, 'soldiers did not always get their pay at the right time.' If you will give him some money I will do without the new cap you promised me."

"How like my own Edith," murmured the father, as he looked in the earnest face of Charlie. "Go back," he said; "if the soldier wants money he shall have it."

The satisfied child ran jumping back, climbed on the knee of Mr. Allen, who, from the window, watched two frolicsome puppies till they were hidden behind some tall houses.

"Did God make both those dogs?" asked the young Charlie, while a thoughtful look stole over his fine face.

"Of course," replied the minister. "He made all things."

"Did he make that little pug, with funny nose and small ears?"

"Certainly; why do you ask?"

"Because he's so awful homely. Any little boy could have done better than that."

At this point Mr. Fletcher entered, followed by a soldier, whom he introduced as recently from the Potomac; wounded in the battle of the Wilderness, and more recently discharged from hospital for troubles requiring a thorough change of diet and air.

Before that beardless youth aged men bowed reverently. He had fought for their country. His life had been periled for equal rights and justice.

"My dear," said the husband, "Mrs. Barlow is engaged. Can you prepare dinner for this young soldier?"

"Certainly. I am happy to do something with my own hands for a needy soldier."

The door was closing behind her as she was leaving the room. Suddenly pushing it back she directed a searching glance to the face of the young stranger. His skin was browned by a Southern sun, his hair neglected and long, but a few telltale curls danced on his broad forehead. No word was spoken, but the next moment the brother and sister were clasped in each other's

arms, for the soldier was Edward Wilmot, and only the falling tears told of a joy too deep for utterance.

The old minister, who had known but little of Annie's early life and surroundings, was bewildered. Not so the brother, who, with clasped hands and bowed head, breathed a prayer of thanksgiving to the Dispenser of all human events. But would the recording angel blot out his transgression, would the much-injured family forgive?

"Annie," the husband at length said, as he laid his hand gently on her arm.

"Yes," she said, "it was so sudden I forgot. My baby brother," she whispered, and again laid her head on his shoulder.

A smile danced in the eyes of the brother as he remembered the pet name of his boyhood from which he had so stoutly rebelled.

Annie had seen too much of life and learned too many lessons of self-control to yield to more than momentary weakness, and, taking the hand of her brother, she placed it in that of her husband, saying as she did so:

"The brother you have never seen."

"But to whom this unexpected meeting is a real joy," replied Mr. Fletcher. "Twice welcome to our home and hearts, and this," he said, leading him to the still bowed figure of Mr. Allen, "is your old neighbor. Time may have touched him roughly, yet he is the same Mr. Allen before whom you figured as Edward, the clerk."

For a moment Annie was paralyzed, as she saw her injured brother turn to the man whose false conception of justice had crushed a thousand hopes, and driven him, a mere boy, from home and friends. But the manliness of the boy had developed a dignity in the man, and, with a frankness that betrayed no thought of an unforgiving past, he took the trembling hand of the old merchant. Neither could speak of the past or pleasures of that blessed hour. Edward was first to gain assurance. "Yes, Mr.

Allen," he said, "I have returned after many scenes to find my loved ones not only spared, but bountifully cared for and blessed. It was not always so, and I think of you as my mother's friend at a time when friends were few."

"Yes, boy. You remember me as her friend, but not yours."

"I can think that you, sir, spoke to me the first word of encouragement to which I ever listened. The first one who could and did help me."

"Then what?"

"Mr. Allen, I would gladly stop here, yet if you desire it, I will speak of a matter which we can now understand the same."

"Yes, Eddie, go on. Tell me of a hatred you could not help, only tell me that you pity my sorrow, and will try to forgive my injustice."

"Mr. Allen, while you believed me guilty of a great sin, I realized that an enemy had done it all. Yet there was anger in my heart. I doubted the goodness of the whole race. I do not think I hated any one. Perhaps I might not foster a particular interest in your welfare, till I heard that recent events had made clear the mysteries I could not unravel. Then I forgave it all. Now I ask again the friendship and confidence of which I trust you believe me worthy."

"Who ever heard of such a boy? Worthy; yes, you shall go back to the store, on a good salary, the hour you get rested and feel able to stand behind the counter. That will be a proud day to me. But, how did you hear of these things?"

"One of the Holman boys came home on a furlough. He learned the fate of the Shermans, and the confession of George. I met him in the hospital, and his words were better than medicine, for he not only told me of the fate of the Shermans, but Mr. Allen, he said that my mother was in the dear old home again, through the instrumentality of yourself and Fred. He told me of Annie's marriage, that Mr. Fletcher had refunded the money that you advanced towards our present home. With this bright

picture before me, do you wonder that my heart turned again to the friends whom I had left without one ceremonious farewell?"

"What led my young brother to think of the army?"

"Recruiting offices were in every town, and I thought enlistment the only available course. I was young, and my girlish face was a great trouble. For eighteen months I was obliged to act as a kind of captain's servant. Since then, I have been in the volunteer service. I had no wish to return till I should meet with no condemning word or accusing look."

"Eddie, you will go home with me to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow, Mr. Allen," interrupted the sister. "I cannot spare him so soon."

"To-morrow, Annie. I am impatient to see the smile of satisfaction which will light your father's sad, patient face, and take a dozen years from his age. I cannot wait to see your mother clasp the child in her arms and say, so softly one can scarcely hear: 'My own good boy; I knew it would be so—that you would be saved from harm and come to me again.' Yes, Annie, we will go to-morrow. I am quite decided."

After a few useless remonstrances, Mrs. Fletcher gave a reluctant consent for her soldier brother to leave Lewiston with Mr. Allen on the morning train.

"I have only to comfort myself, and be very thankful that no train leaves here at midnight," she said, after her guest had departed. "Mr. Allen would not wait till morning if he could get away sooner. He was always tenacious of his own ways and opinions. We always quarreled over Eddie; I, as in the present case, coming off second best."

"Annie," said the brother, as he waited for a carriage, on the following morning, "that pretty child of Mrs. Barlow's is more than fulfilling the extravagant promise of her babyhood. Her sister looks commonplace indeed, when compared with her."

"Fred Allen will not subscribe to such language. He is quite

in love with our Nettie; but he will be obliged to wait—at least till she is out of school.”

“Nettie is a bright, witty little chatter-box, but we may find plenty of them in every town. Agnes will captivate, not with a soft, simpering face, but with the highest order of expressive beauty and perfected loveliness. Think of her. We might well imagine she had stolen through the gates of Paradise. One can well afford to wait for her juvenile years to creep away. The ancient patriarch, who served a term of years for a pretty face, lavished his enthusiasm on an inferior beauty, for I am sure only one Agnes Barlow ever blossomed in this thorny world.”

“Strange,” thought Mrs. Fletcher, “that the future of these two young girls should become so closely woven with one of the saddest incidents in a mother’s life.

“They were very poor and shabby when Fred Allen took them in his father’s carriage from Holman to Bradford, yet Nettie left an impress on the heart of Fred which I doubt not will result in her final departure from Lewiston as his protégé for life. We shall all miss the dear girl, but Fred will be a good husband and a kind son to Mrs. Barlow.

“Ned declared Agnes a beauty, and the idea seems to have grown with his years. Has he learned to love? Will the sweet child some day take a sister’s place in our home? How mysterious, how weighty with important events are some of the little things of life.”

Here the mud-bespattered carriage was announced, and young Wilmot kissed tenderly his sister’s lips, and rode away with the prompt, willful old man, through whose influence had come to him both good and ill.

A short dispatch to Fred, a few hours by rail and they stopped at Bradford. The son, summoned by the dispatch, was awaiting his father with an anxious look, as his expected return was at least two days later.

“What can it mean?” he thought, as he saw the familiar face,

with a happier expression than he had seen there for many months and noted his light step on the platform.

Then the coat of blue caught his eye, and he, too, saw the soft ringlets, waved by the gentle breeze over his sunburned forehead. Even his father was forgotten as he clasped the hand of his youthful friend, whose truth and integrity he had never for a moment doubted. Each gazed silently while the thoughts and deeds of years crowded into the space of a few moments.

But this delay for sentiment's sake was not to be tolerated by the elder Allen. "Come, Fred," he said, almost impatiently, "where is that wonderful horse of yours?"

"This way, father," and the three were soon on their way to Holman. The half-way point was reached. Once and again had the elder Allen consulted his watch before venturing a remark on what he termed the snail's pace of their trip.

"Not so fast, father mine. A five clip, with rough roads and three chaps like us, is not so very bad. Since this is not a race for life we may as well take it easy."

On reaching the store in Holman they learned from a junior clerk that Mr. Wilmot had left for home only a short time before.

Again was the patience of Mr. Allen taxed, and, turning to Fred, he said in a slightly irritated voice:

"We might have been here an hour ago if that Jack of yours had not been half asleep."

At the Wilmot home father and mother were standing by the open door. A prancing horse, the well-defined figures of their neighbors, ah! and the coat of blue, were stopping at their very gate. Not for one moment could the eye of love be deceived. As if by instinct the parent heart knew its own had come to it again. Forgetful of all infirmities Edward flew up the path and would have been as quickly followed by Mr. Allen had not the son detained him.

"Not yet, father, the first meeting is too sacred for other eyes."

"Yes, you are right," but the longing eye turned to the momentarily closed door, then it opened to receive them. After congratulations and a pleasant talk of five minutes the father and son took a lingering and thankful look on a domestic scene not to be forgotten.

As they turned towards their own residence they felt a long-carried load had been lifted; that peace and a quiet happiness would again seek an abode in the desolate heart. Here a white dove, coming from unknown space, circled over the Allen home for a moment, then stayed its rapid flight and rested on its roof, glancing downward and sending forth its cooing notes of love and welcome.

"Oh, happy symbol of the future," whispered the father, as he grasped tightly the arm of his son.

"Yes," replied Fred—

*"'Twas as a dove the spirit came
Down from the open skies;
And a dove it was who brought the branch
To gladden Noah's eyes.'"*

The fall of Richmond was followed by the surrender of Lee's reduced and beggared army.

Pealing bells again rang out the joyful tidings to a waiting and anxious people. The whole land was jubilant and songs of thanksgiving mingled with the fervent prayer, "God save our Chieftain and bless Abraham Lincoln."

"Annie," said Mr. Fletcher, as he entered his home at an unusual hour, "can you bear sad news—the saddest to which the world has listened for eighteen hundred years?

"Abraham Lincoln has fallen by the assassin's hand!"

Mrs. Fletcher looked at her husband to assure herself of his words.

"Can there be no mistake?" she asked, after a long silence.

"Impossible. A detailed account has already reached us. A

bullet, by the hand of Wilkes Booth, consummated the deed of barbarity. From the topmost round in the ladder of earthly fame our President has stepped to heaven."

Struggling with his own emotion, the strong man paced the apartment, while his wife leaned her head against the window by which she was sitting.

The sound of many voices coming in wild confusion caused Mrs. Fletcher to look towards the street, where she saw a concourse of men and boys, while above them all towered the uncovered head of Mr. Ashley, though not till he neared her home did she understand that the citizens of Lewiston were honoring her former lover by an involuntary ride on a narrow plank, which rested on the shoulders of strong men. Excitement increased, and many joined the noisy throng as it passed the principal streets of the town.

"Oh, Wallace, what does it mean?"

"It means that he dared reveal the wickedness of his murder-sympathizing heart by rejoicing at last night's awful tragedy."

"I do not like mob violence—'tis too dreadful."

"Do you know, my Annie, the people of our democratic America do not accept the shooting of a president, chosen by their expressed wish, as a frolic or the overacted part of some foolish crank. Lincoln was a father, gentle as a woman to her only babe. Had he been a despot, ruling with the sword and the gibbet, wrong even then, yet the act might have been excusable to a certain degree. But he inherited no crown, had none to transmit. If his administration was not satisfactory, at the end of four years the voice that gave him authority could put another in his place. And yet more, our Chief Magistrate can be held in check by Congress, can be censured, can be impeached."

"But stay, Wallace. I am not an apologist of this awful crime. The fallen angels could have devised nothing more atrocious. That our patient, long-suffering President, in the very sight of the promised land, should be slain by the assassin is an act we

would fain hide from the historic page. But there is a law for him who slays his brother, is there none for him who encourages and rejoices at the dastardly act? Law—not a mob!”

“That is, indeed, the right thought. But if Mr. Ashley gets off with nothing more serious than his present ride, he may well rejoice and be glad.”

“But why slay our noble President? None could expect by the destruction of one man to change or blot out a government against which marshalled hosts have vainly battled. All must know another would take his place.”

“Of course, and his successor will fail to be his equal. Humane, magnanimous and forgiving, yet a tower of strength that knew no discouragement. Ashley was in sympathy with Booth, and, as such, should not go unpunished.”

“Our government does not pass the enforcement of its laws to an excited rabble.”

“I know—but in an hour like this your ‘excited rabble’ may not stop to think. For more than four years the people have listened for the herald that should bear the banner of peace and proclaim to our stricken land its glad tidings. Ashley spoke at the wrong time; when the people had been hurled from the fullness of joy by the mad act of one man, sustained by such persons as himself. We could not expect him to be treated with thoughtful civility—the open abettor of treason, the champion of Booth.”

“What will he do? He is too proud to be humbled by anything.”

“It would be wise in him to follow in the steps of Judas.”

“Oh, Wallace, I did not suppose you would speak in that way, quite forgetting his poor wife and baby.”

“Kate Sommers would trust herself and future in the keeping of Mr. Ashley. The inevitable has come and she must meet it.”

The next day was a Sabbath of mourning. The wail of a great nation went up for their chosen leader, stolen from them in the midst of his days.

Nothing was thought of Mr. Ashley till the dawn of Monday told of a deserted wife and beggared child. Kate had trusted her husband; he, in a moment of chagrin and rage, had clutched their all, leaving the mother, without a dollar, to seek the bounty of an only brother, or again toil with her hands to meet the necessities of herself and child. A tear dimmed the eye of Mrs. Fletcher as she listened to the narration from her husband.

"I pity poor Kate," she said; "she was the only daughter of indulgent parents and never knew real hardship. At the death of her father his moderate fortune was divided between his two children. Mrs. Ashley has suffered hers to slip from her hands. Now, with a weight at her heart, and a babe in her arms, she must go forth to commence the real struggle of life. Poor Kate, alone and without means, thine is an uphill way of dreary, toilsome days and sleepless nights."

But these sad scenes of war and blood are fading in the past, and a people, who wept so bitterly, now rest in the sunshine of peace and in the hope of continued prosperity.

"You are looking fair and lovely to-night," said a friend to Mrs. Fletcher on the fifth anniversary of her marriage. "We expect married ladies to wear a matronly face, but you are looking more girlish than ever. Time, instead of adding rough touches to your brow, seems to repent of what it has already done, and we see you to-night more youthful in looks than when you came to us five years ago."

"The magic lies in freedom from care and in the considerate attention of a kind and indulgent husband."

"Then you are really as happy as you seem?"

"Happier. So happy that I might in present enjoyment forget the things that were so hard to bear. But I love to think of them sometimes. It gives me courage for those who, less favored than myself, are yet struggling to meet misfortune with a smile."

Here let us leave the heroine of our tale, a better, truer woman

for having, from childhood, encouraged those principles of energy and self-reliance which enabled her to meet difficulties and triumph over obstacles. Principles within the reach of every young girl who would make for herself a character of independence and worth.

THE END.

